

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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### MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

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#### CHAPTER XXXI. BEFORE THE BALL.

It was a strange experience for Porphyria. The background of her mind, generally so full of daylight, had a shadow in it now of discomfort, almost of pain; and the oddest part of this was, that Geoffrey Thorne's suddenly revealed feeling took a place generally reserved to the great troubles and joys of life; she felt that she had known about it always. At first, therefore, she appeared to herself in rather a hideous light of misunderstanding and cruelty. But her mind was too honest to submit to such self-accusation as this. She had not known. Geoffrey's friendship and admiration had, of course, belonged to her always; she could not remember the time when she did not possess and value these—but more than these, no! If she had ever suspected what he had silently and miserably confessed that afternoon, was it likely that she would have treated him so frankly and unconsciously, have asked him to come home to Bryans, have occupied herself with his future?

And that future! If Geoffrey had committed no sin beyond a too ambitious love, he might easily have been forgiven. She would only have been sorry for him; no woman could be angry with him for that. But what right or reason had he to offer Maggie what was not his own? No wonder that neither of them looked very happy. Maggie appeared to her friend in the light of an injured person. It seemed to Miss Latimer that Geoffrey Thorne had

done an unpardonable thing in asking a girl to marry him, while, in plain English, he was in love with somebody else. If some men had done it, there would at least have been no ground for surprise. Maggie, with her beauty and her money, might have been considered a good match by any one; but from Geoffrey, somehow, one expected better things than a mercenary, made-up marriage.

The more Poppy thought of it, the more angry she became. That Maggie should be sacrificed to a disappointed man, by way of pleasing her grandfather and doing well for the Thorne family—it was indeed a different fate from what Poppy had intended for her. Now she knew why the engagement, for which she had hoped and even planned a little, had been from the first a vague disappointment. Whether anything could be done, she did not know; but she lay awake a long time that night thinking about it, and came down the next morning a little pale, and not quite as calmly handsome as usual.

The sight of Arthur, the duty of entertaining her guests, the hundred things that came to occupy her, made it necessary that this trouble should be put aside for the present, and it remained in the background of her mind, nothing but a shadow, making any perfect enjoyment, however, impossible for Poppy. Her eyes rested a little wistfully sometimes on Arthur, both in the evening and through that next day. His spirits were almost too high; he was even a little noisy. His face looked thinner, with a bright touch of unusual colour; his sleepy eyes had a new light in them. Sometimes he coughed, and then his mother frowned and bit her lips. The truth was that she had arrived at Bryans in the evening, with Otto and Alice,

extremely angry with Arthur. He had not been well; she had made arrangements for a specially comfortable journey for him, and was uneasy at his leaving London at all in such weather, to travel down into a bleak country where the snow lay deep. Then he had coolly left the house alone, early in the day, leaving a message to say that he had gone down by the midday train to Bryans.

"Not in love with Poppy? Nonsense! He is ridiculously in love with her. Can't wait to travel decently down with us," she said indignantly to Otto. "And I dare say he won't think of telegraphing for the carriage. He will walk up from the station through snow three feet deep. You laugh, do you? We shall none of us laugh if he has a serious illness."

"I agree with Alice's old sentiment," said Otto quietly. "I shall be glad when Arthur is married and done for."

"I hope it doesn't mean any more of that foolery," he said to his wife when they were alone.

There seemed, however, nothing to show that Arthur had not walked straight from the station to Bryans Court. This was quite enough for Mrs. Nugent, who knew nothing of a greater danger than snow-drifts between the Court and the station. For once she could not control herself, and spoke very sharply to Arthur about his unpardonable rashness. Otto and Alice were in the room. Arthur coloured up and laughed, but answered angrily:

"Look here, mother, if I am so ill that I can't take a walk in winter, I think this affair had better be broken off at once. Go and tell Poppy so, if you like."

"Arthur!"

"I mean it. There's nothing but worry and fuss, and life is not worth living."

He started up and left the room.

"I am certain he has a cold, a feverish cold," said Mrs. Nugent. "He behaves like a baby. I am very angry with him."

She was not even pacified when she saw him laughing with Poppy in the ball-room, and heard him begging Miss Fanny Latimer, in his most amiable and affectionate tones, to give him the first waltz to-morrow.

Several visitors arrived in the early part of the next day. Outside, the world was as wintry as ever, though the snowstorm had stopped. Two or three of Arthur's friends came down for the ball, and a few girls and young men who were friends or distant cousins of the Latimers. There

was no time for any one in the house, not even the Nugents, who were at home there, to think much of their own affairs. That sort of idle bustle reigned which to some men and women is more tiresome than anything in the world. Most of the people arrived in time for luncheon, and all the younger ones went out in the afternoon. Some tried skating on the frozen river; Otto and two or three men took their guns and went off with the keeper. Alice was among the skaters. She came skimming down to the bridge, and saw Poppy, who had walked down with them, standing alone under the great leafless trees in the avenue.

"Where's Arthur?" she called out; "I thought he was with you."

"He has just gone to ask how Mr. Farrant is to-day," Poppy answered.

Her manner and tone were a little grave. Alice stared, then took her skates off and joined her where the snow had been swept off the road.

"Why?" she said.

"Why?" repeated Poppy. "What do you mean?"

"Why has he gone? Did you send him?"

"Old Mr. Farrant has been very ill, you know, and I have been half afraid that Maggie would not be able to come to-night. But she is coming, I hope. Arthur has gone to see if it is all right."

"Why did you not go with him?"

"Well!" Poppy looked at her and smiled. She was not often called upon to invent reasons for her doings. However, this time there were two reasons, and there really was no dishonesty in not telling Alice that she wished to avoid a possible meeting with Geoffrey Thorne.

"I could not leave you all very well," she said.

"Dear thing, you are much too polite," Alice laughed in answer. "By-the-bye, how is that engagement going on—the artist and the beauty?"

"Just the same," said Poppy.

There was a certain dreariness in her tone, and she began suddenly to walk up and down. Alice, too, felt that it was too cold to stand still, and hurried along by her side, asking more questions; they were now about the dance and the people who were coming to it. Poppy answered them fully and frankly.

The others skated away down the river, past Mr. Farrant's garden, through the Rector's field. The short afternoon was



closing, a rosy twilight—for the sky had cleared—was beginning to shine over the snow, before Arthur came back from his mission. Poppy and her friends had nearly reached the house on their way home to tea. Alice looked up sharply as he overtook them. He did not return her glance, but walked quietly beside Poppy and said to her:

"Yes, she's coming. I saw her. Nobody else was there. She took me up to see the old man. His illness has not improved his temper. Poor girl! I'm sorry for her. But he praised his future son-in-law up to the skies."

"Yes—he is good," said Poppy, in a low, half-questioning tone. "Yes. Poor Maggie!"

Among all the people, young or old, who were assembled at Bryans Court that day, the happiest was Miss Fanny Latimer. No uncertainties, no hopes and fears and complications, were there to disturb her peace. She could look forward, if not to a lifetime, like these younger ones, yet to some years to be spent with a dear friend who loved her sincerely, whose admiration was not affected by passing time, and in whom her trust was absolute and unclouded. Such happiness as this could hardly be shadowed by the fact which in former days would have troubled her, that her beloved Mrs. Nugent had come to Bryans in a bad temper, hardly to be altogether explained by Arthur's rebelliousness.

Mrs. Nugent in truth looked on Fanny's engagement rather in the light of an injury to herself. Fanny was a useful friend. She had never particularly liked or understood Mr. Cantillon. She thought him a little tiresome, a little absurd, with his enthusiasm and his fancies. She could not deny that it would be a happy marriage, but she was a little scornful of Fanny for making it all the same. She probably felt that Mr. Cantillon did not like her. Fortunately, however, Fanny's affection for him was far too deep to be troubled by any small secret darts of the enemy, and Mrs. Nugent, of course, could make no open opposition.

Nothing really troubled Miss Latimer, therefore, as she stood by her bedroom fire before going down to dinner that evening, in a lovely new gown of black and gold. Her small, pretty figure was set off to the best advantage; her fair hair, only a little grey, was dressed most becomingly. After

her maid had left the room, she had stood for several minutes before a long glass, looking at herself with a smile. The conviction of looking both pretty and young is pleasant at any age, especially when one feels certain of admiration from one person at least. Fanny walked slowly to the fire, with the smile of pleasant expectation still upon her lips.

A few people were coming to dinner, Mr. Cantillon, of course, among them. He had promised to be early, and Fanny was now listening for his familiar ring. She would then go downstairs and meet him in the hall, and they had arranged for a few minutes' talk in the library before it was necessary to join the other people in the drawing-room. Therefore she was ready in good time, and no girl who was coming to the Bryans ball that evening bore a lighter heart.

"I wonder if Poppy is ready?" thought the little lady as she stood by her fire.

"I may as well go and see."

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Miss Latimer.

The door was opened slowly and cautiously.

"Who is it? Oh, come in, Arch. Do you want me?"

Mrs. Arch stepped forward into the room, looking round her with an air of anxious secrecy which amused Miss Latimer.

"You are alone, ma'am? Can I speak to you, if you please?"

"Certainly. Shut the door. What is it?"

Fanny now remembered that the house-keeper had gone about all day with an unusually long face. Something had evidently been very wrong; but as the excellent Arch was subject to periodical fits of gloom, during which no one in the house could do right, the matter troubled her little, and she had not thought of enquiring into it. Even now she only thought that if any of the younger servants had to be sent away, Mrs. Arch might as well have kept back her complaint till to-morrow morning.

"I have been greatly put about, if you please, ma'am," said Mrs. Arch, "and it's been long before I could decide what was my duty. If it had been the first time that such talk reached my ears, I should ha' put it on one side as a pack of rubbish—and so I did the first time. And even now I've silenced them—and they understand that if I hear a word more, there'll

be changes before long, and some folks may find themselves out of work at an awkward time of year. For I'll have no gossips and scandal-mongers coming about my kitchen and hall. But still, it seems to me as things are going rather far, and I can't agree with my conscience to leave you ignorant. I did think of speaking to the Rector, but there are cases where the best of men don't so clearly see their way, and so——"

"Is it a long story?" said Miss Latimer, glancing at her little clock.

Mrs. Arch looked the picture of gloom as she stood there, looking down at the floor and twisting her hands together. When she once began, she was a woman of many words, and it was not easy to disentangle her meaning with any quickness. Neither was she clever at catching opportune moments. Miss Latimer felt quite sure that all this preluded a serious complaint of a new kitchen-maid, a girl in whom Poppy had interested herself, and who had been engaged by her wish, though Mrs. Arch thought her too pretty, and distrusted her from the first. It seemed more ridiculous every moment, five minutes before dinner on the night of the ball, that Mrs. Arch should have chosen such a time for her household matters.

"I suppose it is about Annie Kent?" said Fanny a little impatiently.

Mrs. Arch lifted her head and stared.

"Annie Kent, Miss Frances? I beg your pardon."

"Well, who is it, then?"

Suddenly Miss Latimer was frightened. Mrs. Arch, as she looked up, was quite pale, and her eyes were round with horror. Her face said, though she did not use the words: "Are you so mad, so blind, as not to see that something of real importance has brought me here at such a time?"

Fanny Latimer felt herself turning pale, too; the room seemed suddenly colder; she became conscious that Mrs. Arch had something dreadful to tell her—something which was hanging over her head—over all their heads. She sat down quietly and feebly in a low chair. She forgot her pretty dress, and the look of youth and pleasure died out of her face.

"Arch," she said, in a strange, hurried voice, "why do you frighten me like this? Put some coals on, please; it is so dreadfully cold. There, sit down in that chair and tell me what you mean—at once—there's no time. I must go down directly."

"I think you should have your eyes open to-night, Miss Frances; and that's why I tell you," said Mrs. Arch with extreme gravity; and then she began her story.

In consequence of this delay Mr. Cantillon arrived, lingered in the hall, looked into the library, and found Miss Fanny Latimer nowhere. The drawing-room was empty; he warmed himself at its glorious fire, and hoped that Fanny might be the first person to come down. He looked round, and thought, with a tender smile, how well it was that Fanny had not had her way with this pleasant old room. Somehow, any original look of dulness and stiffness had deserted it now; perhaps with the retreat of the illustrated books and a few immense vases. The pictures still enthroned there looked down quite happily on certain modern books and comfortable chairs which had made their way in. Glowing in evening light, Poppy's drawing-room was full of a kind of homely luxuriousness. Her grandmother would have been at home there, and the remark of the youngest and most artistic visitor was, "What a jolly room!"

The first person to come down was not Fanny Latimer, but Porphyria, all in white. Mr. Cantillon welcomed her as "next best," and for a few minutes they talked happily by the fire.

"So I hear my friend Geoffrey is not coming to-night," said the Rector.

Poppy did not answer for a moment; her face was shadowed by her fan.

"No," she said quietly. "He is going to take care of Mr. Farrant."

"Very amiable of him. I hope Maggie will miss him. But I think she will. I think she appreciates him—more than I quite expected."

"You think they are happy?"

Mr. Cantillon stared a little, but he could only clearly see the top of her fair shining head.

"Why not, Porphyria? I have no reason to think otherwise; have you?"

"I wonder why he asked her to marry him!"

Mr. Cantillon stared still more, and made a little face.

"For the usual reason, we must suppose," he said. "But the complete knowledge of motives, my dear—that is a science in itself."

"But what is the usual reason?"

Then Mr. Cantillon smiled.

How much further the subject would

have been discussed it is impossible to say, for Otto Nugent and his wife came in at this moment, followed immediately by Captain Lawson and Mr. Scott, Arthur's friends, and very soon by everybody else. Then came the arrival of a few neighbours who had driven through the snow. Last of all, when the whole party was assembled, Miss Fanny Latimer slipped in so quietly that nobody noticed her at the moment, except the one person who was watching for her, and she had hardly had time to speak to anybody when dinner was announced.

The little lady's smartness had in great measure departed. Her pretty head drooped, and looked almost dowdy; it seemed to want a finishing touch. She seemed to have shrunk into her dress, which hung about her carelessly. Her manner was absent and distracted; a slight frown spoke of depths of silent worry. She was pale, and her mouth looked drawn and old. She talked and listened with a kind of mock earnestness to a good-natured hunting neighbour, Colonel Graham, who had taken her in to dinner.

The party was a very cheerful one, and nobody noticed Fanny's looks much. The young people were busy with each other, the old with the young. Only Mr. Cantillon watched her, and with a kind of puzzled disappointment, which brought an imploring smile into her eyes as she glanced once or twice at him. When Arthur Nugent's voice was heard—he was looking very handsome and in wonderful spirits—she turned to Colonel Graham with even more eagerness than before. The only person she looked at much was her dear niece Porphyria—fair, beautiful, serene. To her Fanny's eyes seemed to be painfully attracted, and once when she suddenly looked away, turning once more to her friendly neighbour, they were shining with tears. Into such a state of nervous misery had the last hour brought her, the happiest woman in Bryans, while her own peaceful future lived on just the same, even watching her at the same table out of Henry Cantillon's kind eyes.

### THE REMARKABLE SIDE OF MARRIAGE.

#### LASTING UNIONS.

As there is no subject in which more people are interested than marriage, seeing that nearly the whole male and female

population of the world contemplate it at one time or another, a few curiosities of the marriage tie may prove interesting. Of those who have been a long time married there are not many instances on record, though doubtless a careful enquiry would furnish numerous cases.

The greatest period covered by a marriage tie which I have been able to find is of recent date, and for aught I know to the contrary still continues. In 1888 a couple were living at the Hacienda of Rio Florida, Mexico, who had then been married ninety-five years. The husband was one hundred and twenty and the wife one hundred and ten years of age. The owners of the Hacienda and the residents on the neighbouring plantations were then looking forward with pleasure to giving this old couple many wedding presents on the hundredth anniversary of their marriage, which will be next year, 1893.

In May, 1890, death dissolved what must have been the longest marriage union in this country. Mr. Hugh Jones, of Clynnog, who was buried in that month, was, according to local records and beliefs, married to Sian Jones as long ago as Easter, 1813. For seventy-seven years this faithful couple had been man and wife, and their diamond wedding was celebrated in 1888 with appropriate pomp and circumstance. A fortnight before his death the old gentleman had a fall which resulted fatally. His widow, though confined to her room, and one hundred and two years of age, was in full possession of her intellectual faculties.

In 1889, at Moore, near Warrington, there resided a Darby and Joan, whose united ages totalled one hundred and seventy-two years, who had been married sixty years and had brought up a large family. They were both born in the district, and had occupied the same house half a century.

A writer in the "Gentleman's Magazine," in 1763, records that "About three months ago I had an opportunity of conversing with Robert Ogleby, the old travelling tinker. He says he has not eaten any flesh meat for twelve years, but lives chiefly on bread and milk, butter, cheese, and puddings. He married at the age of twenty-two, and lived with his wife seventy-five years. He has twenty-five children, twelve sons and thirteen daughters. His wife died thirteen years ago. His father lived to the age of one hundred and forty." At the time this writer saw Ogleby he

must have been in his one hundred and tenth year, as the Ripon Parish Register for the sixteenth of November, 1654, states that on that day was born "Robert Ogleby, son of John Ogleby, of Rippon."

Early in the last century, William Douglas, of Lanark, married a wife who was born at the same hour on the same day as himself. They were christened at the same church, and at nineteen years of age were married with the consent of their relatives at the church in which they had been baptized. During the course of a long life they experienced no infirmity, and died at the age of one hundred years on the same day, reposing together on the old nuptial bed. They were interred in the same grave beneath the baptismal font where nearly a century before they had been presented for the Church's first sacrament.

In July, 1768, a couple were living in Essex who had been married eighty-one years, the husband being one hundred and seven, and the wife one hundred and three years of age.

About the same time there died at Coal Pit Heath, Gloucestershire, aged one hundred and three years, a yeoman, and the day following his funeral, his widow, aged one hundred and fifteen years, who had also been married eighty-one years.

#### MARRYING EARLY AND MARRYING OFTEN.

The first place in the list of those who have married early and married often must be taken by Lady Elizabeth Darcey, the daughter of Thomas Earl Rivers, on account of the curious coincidence attending her marriages. She was wooed by three suitors at the same time, and the knights, as in chivalry bound, were disposed to contest the prize in the customary manner. This the lady peremptorily forbade, and promised in a jocular manner, if they had but patience, she would have them all three in their turn, and what is most remarkable she literally fulfilled her promise. First she married Sir George Trenchard, of Wolverton, who left her a widow at seventeen; secondly, Sir John Gage, of Fittle, and thirdly, William Henry, of Hickworth, the three original claimants for her hand.

More remarkable still is the case of a farmer in one of the northern counties, who one day took five young women in his cart to a religious service. After the drive and the service he became the

husband of one of the ladies. She died, and when he was in search of a second wife he met another of those who had joined him in the drive. She was not averse to the match, and they were married. Like number one she did not live long, and in succession he married the third, fourth, and fifth of the young women. Whether he lived to place number five by the side of her companions is not recorded, and this is just where the story falls in its completeness.

There died at Florence, in 1768, Elizabeth Masé, who was led to the altar seven times and buried the whole of her partners. Her last venture was at seventy years of age. On her death-bed she recalled the good and bad points of each husband, and having weighed them impartially, expressed a desire to be buried by the side of her fifth husband.

An announcement in England in the same year stated that Mr. Silvertop was lately united at Newcastle to Mrs. Pearson. It was, says the announcement, "the third time the lady had been led to the altar in the character of a bride, and there has been something remarkable in each of her three connubial engagements. Her first husband was a Quaker, her second a Roman Catholic, and her third a Protestant of the Established Church. Each husband was twice her age. At sixteen she married a gentleman of thirty-two; at thirty she took one of sixty; and now at forty-two she is united to a gentleman of eighty-four."

At an agricultural village in England, some time in the last century, a couple were joined in the holy bonds of matrimony whose united ages came to one hundred and fifty-eight years; the bride was eighty-one, and the bridegroom seventy-seven. The groom's Christian name was Thomas, and the bride's Mary. The groom had twice before married a Mary, and the bride had twice before married a Thomas. To crown all, both were at the time of their marriage in receipt of parochial relief.

A gentleman died at Bourdeaux, in 1772, who had led no fewer than sixteen ladies to the hymeneal altar.

The same year witnessed the nuptials of a lady, eighty-five years of age, who had espoused six husbands, with her seventh. This marriage took place at the church of St. Clement Dane, London.

About the same time a gentleman died at the age of one hundred and fifteen years who had had four wives, and who left



behind to mourn his loss a widow and twenty-three children, whose ages varied from three to eighty years.

In 1784 there died an old army veteran who had had five wives, and his widow, ninety years of age, wept over the grave of her fourth husband.

The merry month of June, 1778, saw celebrated at St. Bridget's Church, Chester, the marriage of Mr. George Harding, a youthful bridegroom of one hundred and seven years, and Mrs. Catherine Woodward, a blushing damsel of eighty-three years. The bridegroom served in the army for thirty-nine years, during the reign of Queen Anne, George the First, and part of George the Second. He was at the time of his marriage particularly hearty, in great spirits, and had retained his faculties to an extraordinary perfection. This was his fifth matrimonial venture, his last previous essay having been at the age of one hundred and five. His bride had thrice before been led to the altar. The record of the event states that Mr. Harding's diet for thirty years had consisted of butter-milk boiled with a little flour, and bread and cheese.

In 1804, Mr. Samuel, of Sonning, after burying four wives, led Mrs. E. Newkirk to the altar, she overlooking the fact that she had to take to no fewer than thirty-two children.

In the same year there died at Balbindangan, Ireland, Mr. Coorslin, one hundred and fourteen years of age. This venturesome old gentleman led to the altar his seventh wife at the age of ninety-three years, and when he died he left behind forty-three children, two hundred and thirty-six grandchildren, and nine hundred and forty-four great grandchildren.

Very early in the present century (1805) there was recorded the case of an amorous old lady, eighty years of age, who had buried three husbands, and then threw away her crutches at the door of a wold church in Yorkshire on becoming the wife of a farmer named Wood.

A Mr. Meadows, of Liverpool, had a record which is unique. He was married for the sixth time, aged seventy-five years, at Walton Church in 1807. The first period of widowhood lasted a year, the second a month, the third seven weeks, the fourth nine months, and the fifth the shortest of all—only six weeks.

In 1809, Mrs. Jarvis, of Hawarden, married her sixth husband, a publican,

named John Wright. At the time of this marriage she was in the eighties, and had only interred her last choice five weeks previously.

In 1816 a youth named Jones had sufficient courage to marry Mrs. Mary Harris, a fifty-five year old widow, who had deposited beneath the daisies no fewer than five husbands.

The last instance is not so much a record of numerous marriages as an instance of coincidences. Mr. Butin, an inhabitant of Commynes, who died there early in the century at the age of eighty-four years, was only twice married. His second wife was born the day his first wife died, and on the birthday he jocularly remarked he would never marry any other wife than that infant. For twenty years he waited, and then led the "infant" to the altar, he being aged sixty-four years. The first child was born twelve months after marriage, and the second twenty years later. At his death he left several children, the eldest of whom was sixty years of age, and the youngest two months. He lived twenty years with his first wife, was twenty years a widower, and his second marriage lasted twenty years.

#### THE MEETING OF EXTREMES.

Probably extremes meet more often in marriage than in any other undertaking in life. Particularly is this the case with regard to age—the mating of May and December being no uncommon occurrence. In these days, however, such occurrences are not blazoned forth as they were a century ago, and seekers after antiquities are perhaps apt to suppose they are less frequent than they used to be. Old newspapers and historical and chronological magazines are full of them, and it may not be uninteresting to note a few at the present time.

In Scotland, in the year 1749, a most extraordinary case of decrepitude and vigour being united occurred. The bridegroom, a noted old bachelor named William Hamilton, was so deformed as to be utterly unable to walk. His legs were drawn up to his ears, his arms were twisted backwards, and almost every member of his body was out of joint. Added to these peculiarities was the fact that he was eighty years of age, and had to be carried to church on men's shoulders. Nevertheless, a fair maid of only twenty-two summers

had the courage to accompany him into the sacred edifice and pledge herself to love, honour, and obey him as long as life should last. In all probability there was some ulterior motive to be served, or this union would not have taken place. It is absurd to suppose that "sacred love" had anything to do with the marriage.

The "Derby Mercury" for January, 1753, contains the following remarkable account of such a marriage :

"Ashford in the Peak, January the eighth, 1753. Sir,—If you please to give this a line in your paper, you will very much oblige your constant reader and humble servant, etc., J. C. Last Saturday, at the chapel of Sheldon, in the High Peak of Derbyshire, was solemnised the nuptials of a widow Gentlewoman, of that Place, of about Eighty Years of Age, to a Young Lad (by the Consent of his Parents) of about Fourteen. As she was render'd incapable of walking, by a Complication of Disorders, she was carried in her Chair, from her House to the Chapel, about a Hundred Yards distant, attended by a numerous Concourse of People ; where the ceremony was performed with becoming Seriousness and Devotion ; after which she was re-conducted in the same Manner, the Musick playing by her orders the Duke of Rutland's Hornpipe before her ; to which (as she was disabled from dancing) she beat time with her Hands on her petticoats, till she got Home, and then Called for her Crutches, commanded her Husband to dance, and she shuffled herself as well as she could. The day being spent with the ringing of a Bell and other demonstrations of Joy ; and the Populace (mostly Miners) being soundly drenched with Showers of Excellent Liquor, etc., that were plentifully poured upon them."

It appears happily or unhappily, as the case may be, that the ancient bride did not long survive her marriage, for in a subsequent issue during the same month the following announcement appeared :

"We are informed that last Sunday dy'd at Sheldon, near Bakewell, the old Gentlewoman who was marry'd on the fifth Instant to a young Lad, aged Fourteen, as mentioned in a former paper. Her Corpse was brought to Bakewell Church on Tuesday last, where it was handsomely interred, and a funeral Sermon preached on the occasion to a numerous and crowded Audience, by the Rev. Gentleman who had so lately perform'd the Nuptial Ceremonies."

In 1769 a seventy-two year old lady, residing at Rotherhithe, permitted a young gallant of twenty-three years to lead her to the altar, where she pledged him her troth, and he took her and her fortune for better or for worse.

In the same year a blind woman, ninety years of age, at Hill Farm, Berkshire, still possessed sufficient attractions to dazzle the eyes and win the heart of her twenty year old ploughman. Probably the farm went with the bride.

More easily understood is the case of an eighteen year old miss who hesitated not to accompany a Worcestershire Squire, eighty-five years of age, to the altar, and so become an old man's darling, that probably she might afterwards find a young man willing to accept her as a slave.

In February, 1769, Robert Judge, Esquire, of Cooksburgh, Ireland, then ninety-five years of age, was united to Miss Annie Nugent, aged fifteen years. The bridegroom had served in King William's wars, and received a musket ball in his nose.

At ninety years of age Robert Cumming, of Strathpey, walked forty miles for the purpose of espousing a bride in the twenties, while an octogenarian lover walked fifteen miles to lead a fifteen year old bride to church.

In 1774 a sprightly youth just verging on his century cast in his lot with a blushing matron of thirty. At the ceremony he was so infirm or nervous that the ring dropped several times before he could get it on her finger. After marriage, however, he had so far recovered as to be able to discard his faithful cane on leaving the church.

Though much merriment is often made of May and December marriages, they are not always unhappy. A noteworthy example of how happy they may be is furnished by the case of Cromwell's Chancellor, Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke, and a young widow named Mary Wilson. Mary's first husband, who died while a young man, was a city merchant, and during the Civil War obtained the post of Colonel in the Parliamentary forces. On his death, many wooed the widow, who possessed considerable charms both of mind and manner, but Sir Bulstrode succeeded in carrying off the prize. The lady kept a diary, written for her son, in which the following quaint entry appears: "Whom to choose I knew not, for they were all

alike to me. At last I went to God by prayer, and did lay my condition before the Lord, and beg of Him that if it were His good pleasure to have me alter my condition, that He would choose out a fitting match for me. As for my own part, I did slight titles and honours. When I was in this frame of spirit, amongst many others came a grave gentleman that had ten children, which at the first notice did startle me, and did cause all my friends to be against it. But after I had spent very much time in seeking God to direct me, at last I was brought to consider that children were a blessing. 'Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemies in the gate.' And seeing that they were a blessing and the gift of God, as you may see in Psalm cxxxiii., the third and fourth verses, where the Lord saith: 'Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the side of thine house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.' So that I durst not refuse a man for having ten blessings. And God did hear my prayers and bless our marriage, for He did give me a great mercy in my husband."

It is to be regretted that all wives and husbands have not this happy experience, but it is to be feared that for one so full of connubial bliss, there are many ill-assorted couples fretting and fuming to break a yoke which galls them.

The year 1805 saw the union of Lieutenant Humphreys, of the Lizard Signal Station, who was born half-way in the previous century, with a fifteen year old wife; while a disabled veteran named Feltham, seventy-two years of age, who had served in the Royal Marines, was carried to church at Trowbridge, in a sedan chair, to become the husband of a girl of sixteen.

More remarkable, perhaps, was the case of a farmer residing in the neighbourhood of Sheffield, who, in 1804, when seventy-five years of age, led a child bride to the altar. This gay young spark had, half a century before, led to the altar an old maid who might have been his grandmother.

To take another instance of an elderly bride. Early in the century, according to the "Hibernian Gazette," Mr. John Hogarty, of Ballymanduff, Dublin County, before he had attained his majority, was sufficiently courageous to link his fate with widow Flood, who possessed the experience gained by eighty-eight winters. It is

impossible to understand the case of Miss Carr, twenty-two years of age, the possessor of fifteen thousand pounds, who gave herself and her fortune to a clergyman sixty years older than herself, unless she preferred being an old man's darling to a young man's slave.

I have only one more instance, and I will leave the subject. At Tynemouth Church, in 1805, a young man about twenty-three years of age was duly married to a widow of eighty-six, who had been the mother of no fewer than seventeen children. Notwithstanding that the banns had been but twice published, the experienced lady repaired to the church, where she was soon joined by her lover, and declared she would not leave it without her errand. It was only after considerable remonstrance that she was persuaded to leave and return again after the legal period of publication had elapsed.

#### CHILD MARRIAGES.

England can furnish instances of child marriages, not perhaps to any great extent, but as young as any to be found in Eastern countries, where such marriages are almost of daily occurrence. The youngest English bride on record is, beyond all doubt, a daughter of Sir William Brereton, who, in the sixteenth century, was united in the bonds of holy matrimony, when only two years of age, to a bridegroom who was only her senior by one year. In this case the children were carried into church, and their elders spoke for them. Subsequently, when the pair reached years of maturity, they ratified the strange tie. In this instance the object was to carry out a desire to unite property.

In 1562 Randle Moore was married at the age of eight years to a bride two years his senior; and about the same time Emma Talbot, six years of age, had a five year old husband provided for her in the person of Gilbert Gerrard. In this case the bridegroom's uncle held him up and spoke the marriage words for him, while the bride answered for herself, as she had been taught.

In 1582 William Chatterton, who was Bishop of Chester and Lincoln successively, thought it nothing out of the way to perform the marriage ceremony uniting his nine year old daughter Joan with Richard Brooke, an eleven year old "man." This ceremony was, by consent of the contracting parties, ratified four years later.

The Chester Church records contain lengthy documents testifying to this ratification. In this instance the marriage was not a success, for the Bishop records that the wife was separated from her husband.

#### REMARKABLE COMBINATIONS.

The daily and weekly newspapers are constantly recording curious combinations of names in the marriage columns, and those who study them will often be rewarded with something unique. Indeed such combinations have proved inspiration sufficient for the poet's pen. Such was the case when a Mr. Six was united to Miss Dunbar. On this occasion a poet with an eye to the main chance wrote :

It used to be when folks were wed  
 "These two are one," the parson said.  
 But see how Hymen, full of tricks,  
 Has made two one, yet made them Six ;  
 Nay, each is Six, and one as well.  
 Are both a dozen ? Who can tell  
 How shall we reckon by-and-by,  
 When six by six we multiply ?  
 How e'er it be, grant gracious heavens,  
 They ne'er may be at six and sevens.

At Barnstable and Chicago there once occurred the oddest collection of queer names it is possible to find. At Barnstable, Rev. John Gates joined together for better or worse Mr. John Post to Miss Sarah Rails ! At Chicago the knot was tied which bound Mr. Halter and Miss Rope in an indissoluble bond by the Rev. Mr. Knott ! Surely such a marriage was fast bound !

On the seventeenth of May, 1834, Joshua Peck and Amelia Bushel were married at Washington, when a local poet penned these lines :

All zookers, robes, and wedding cakes—  
 What change of measures marriage makes ;  
 Quick as a thought at Hymen's beck  
 A Bushel changed into a Peck.

On the third of February, 1814, Mr. Isaac Hill, one of the editors of the "Concord Patriot," was married to Miss Ayer, and this effusion was quickly penned :

As I walked out the other day,  
 Through Concord Street I took my way ;  
 I saw a sight I thought quite rare—  
 A Hill walked out to take the Ayer.  
 And now, since earth and air have met together,  
 I think there'll be a change of weather.

Very witty was the couplet which was written when, at New York, in 1832, Mr. Thomas A. Secord carried off Miss Cordelia Ketcham :

"Ketcham, Cordelia, if you can."  
 "I have," says she ; "Secord's the man."

Equally good is the verse on the marriage

of James Anderson and Miss Ann Bread at Black Lake, in 1828 :

While toasts the lovely graces spread,  
 And fops around them flutter,  
 I'll be contented with Ann Bread,  
 And won't have any but her.

A cold match was that which was converted into a marriage at Washington in March, 1814, between Mr. Samuel Winter and Miss Pamela January, while there was a touch of sadness about one a year later between Captain Graves and Miss Nancy Graves, of Carrol, N.C.

At Swindon, Wiltshire, some years ago, Mr. Duck eloped with Miss Herring, which gave the inspiration for this stanza :

Of't has a heron took flight with an eel,  
 Or a trout by a bit of good luck,  
 But I never could bring my mind to feel  
 That a Herring would bolt with a Duck.

The last I shall quote of these marriages was celebrated at Winniesburg on the fifteenth of April, 1853. "By the Rev. Mr. Malone, at St. Peter's Church, Mr. W. Moon to Miss Agnes Cooke." This is what the local poet wrote :

He is not mad, though lunar light  
 His broth did overlook,  
 For he has gained, to his delight,  
 A wife that is a Cooke.  
 His goose is cooked, and other maids  
 May envy her the boon,  
 Whose tall ambition wished and got  
 The bright man in the Moon.

#### A DEAN'S MEMORIES.

##### IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

FOND though he be of wild flowers,  
 Dean Hole delights in gardening, and  
 concurs with Bacon in esteem for its high  
 value. Is it the dim innate remembrance of  
 Eden, he wonders, which makes our child-  
 hood so happy among the flowers ? And  
 then he gives a pretty picture of a child's  
 garden, drawn from his own happy  
 memory of home ; where the doll's-house  
 represented the family mansion, and the  
 wives of pre-diluvial persons were  
 assembled, with some other creatures, from  
 Noah's Ark ; and where the gardener, "a  
 tin soldier in full uniform with fixed  
 bayonet, spent most of his time lying on  
 his stomach, his form being fragile, and the  
 situation windy." Nor does he forget the  
 arbour, formed of an old oyster-barrel  
 lying on its side, which had furnished  
 shells for hedgerows, as in Lord Macaulay's  
 days of ancient home ; when, discover-  
 ing that his small sister had displaced  
 a boundary, he rushed into the house, ex-



claiming in his wrath : "Cursed be Sally ! Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark !"

From gay to grave. As a sad contrast to this pleasantry, the Dean describes on the page previous the visit of a lady friend of his to a garret in Whitechapel, taking a fresh bunch of primroses to a poor heart-broken woman who had crossed the Bridge of Sighs, and was stricken nigh to death by suffering and sin. "She looked at them for a few seconds with a stupid stare of apathy, and then suddenly they suggested some thought which seemed to thrill through her like a galvanic shock, and she burst into tears, 'tears from the depths of some divine despair, while thinking of the days that are no more.'"

Primroses the Dean loves ; and lovingly implores, with all the pathos of italics, that, when used for Easter services, they should be "in bunches, and in water." But while he loves the primrose, he adores the rose. And who can wonder at the preference ? What is there in all nature, sweet to smell and sweet to see, "like a rose embowered in its own green leaves ?" Queen of flowers, she commands the Dean's most loyal admiration, and his loyalty is shown by a life-service at her court. Beginning as a boy, by presiding at an exhibition of a few petals of pansies and roses, spread out upon paper and covered with bits of glass—"we called it a 'Flower Show,' and the servants said it was 'beautiful!'"—the Dean was the prime mover of the First National Rose Show, and himself enlarged his rose garden until he was the proud "lord of five thousand trees." He has personally known all the great rose-growers in England, and even some in France ; and has passed many an anxious hour with them while acting as a judge. For, despite his gift of humour and his kindness of heart, the Dean can be severe and stern as Rhadamanthus ; and, when condemned by justice, the miserable culprits find his sentences no joke. For instance, he records how once, while judging at a rose show, he heard a hint that an exhibitor, to whom a first prize appeared probable, had not grown but bought or borrowed some of the blooms he showed. So, being a man of action, the Dean jumped into a dog-cart, and drove some four miles to the garden of the suspected grower ; and was back in time to write upon his card—instead of the "First Prize" about to be awarded—the fatal words : "Disqualified, and expelled from the society."

Gardening, the Dean holds, is a refining occupation ; good alike for mind and body ; teaching both the love of the beautiful and the knowledge of the useful. And he asks, why should not horticulture be taught now in our schools ? With a colonial life in prospect, many a boy might be employed far better in learning to prune pear-trees, than in digging up Greek roots, and the heirs to lordly gardens would find life more worth living, if they knew how to manage them, and were not, as nine in ten are, at the mercy of their gardeners. And how vastly would the value of allotments be enhanced, if their owners had learned somewhat of the science of spade-husbandry ! "Tell the poor man how to grow vegetables and fruit, and his wife how to cook and preserve them, and the rich man to help both, starting them with a few good trees and seeds, and requesting his gardener to give occasional advice, and you will deserve and win the gratitude of your fellow-men."

To cricket the Dean fittingly devotes plenty of space. His memories date back to well-nigh prehistoric times, when the veteran Box kept wicket, and Fuller Pilch reigned king over the "wielders of the willow," to use the language of "Bell's Life," the euphemistic parent of our now prosaic sporting press. A man of Notts himself, he delights in telling how at a great match which he witnessed between that county and Kent, the famous bowler, Clark, lured Mynn to knock his bail off with the third ball bowled. He tells how he himself once made a "record" hit : while playing single wicket with a friend and his retriever. The dog, when fielding for his master, ran off with the ball, and the Dean scored twenty-seven runs before it was brought back. He tells, moreover, of a miner, who had much despised his parson until he made a big hit, which so startled the rough fielder that he fell flat on the ground in fear to stop the ball. Soon afterwards the poor fellow, being injured by an accident, sent for the clergyman ; and, on his avowing some surprise at the message, "Oh," said the miner frankly, "that hit o' yours to square leg for six converted me !"

The Dean relates, too, a funny story of a bowler of sad countenance, who was a harmless lunatic brought from an asylum ; and who, with a prophetic preface of apology, gravely with his first ball ripped out the middle stump. And here the present writer is reminded of a game

which he once played in the grounds of an asylum, wherein a young doctor, a Cantab, and himself were the only players who reputedly were sane. The match was singularly noiseless, but varied by strange incidents. The bowler would pause suddenly, while just in the act of delivering a ball, and would fling it to a fielder, who would throw it high in air, as though a wicket had been felled. Or the batter would just block a ball, and calmly pick it up and put it in his pocket, and then start smilingly to score some half-a-dozen runs.

Of authors and of artists the Dean has much to say, including among the former both Charles Dickens and Thackeray, and among the latter his dearest friend, John Leech. His own efforts as an author began in early boyhood, his first drama being acted at the age of eight. That it was thoroughly sensational may be gathered from its start: "Act I., Scene I. Enter a man, swimming for his life!" The author, being also the principal performer, was so exhausted by his efforts that the rest of this great play remains in memory a blank. But of the grand epic which succeeded it the splendid opening couplet has been happily preserved:

We heard the rumbling of Great Gallia's drum,  
Onward we saw the hostile army come.

Of this the Dean says proudly:

"I consider [the rumbling] to be one of the most striking lines in the language; and I have often wished, when in Paris and in other cities of France, that she had only one drum to rumble!"

With Thackeray the Dean was frequently in company, first meeting him at Leech's house, and there standing back to back with him to see who was the taller; the height being declared equal, three inches and six feet. This elicited apt reference to the Eton boy's pentameter,

*Gigantes que duo, super honore meo—*

to be found in his fine classic poem upon Windsor Fair. Of Thackeray, his fellow "gigas," the Dean declares with emphasis that "he was the best talker I ever knew;" and certainly his knowledge has been wide in this respect. Specially he instances a conversation, wherein a learned man from Cambridge took some part; and when Thackeray affirmed that one of the best results of knowledge was to convince a man of his ignorance. "He seemed to preach from the text, although he did not name it, that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

The Dean lived in still closer companionship with Leech: both in his happy home, where he was loved so dearly, and in the hunting-field, where his blithe humour was delightful. He liked to ride a quiet horse; and then, feeling safely mounted, he could let his mind be occupied by beauties of the scenery, or incidents worth noticing, which his quick eye was sure to seize upon, and his clever pencil was quick to reproduce. "Give me an animal," he would say, "on which you can carry an umbrella in a hail-storm." It was with John Leech that the Dean made his "Little Tour in Ireland;" whereof the pleasure was enhanced by the artist's sweet society, and the record was enriched by the treasures of his art. It was through Leech's friendship that the Dean had the rare privilege of dining with Mr. Punch at his official weekly banquet; an honour which no clergyman until then had enjoyed, and probably none since. It was Leech who acted as the Dean's "best man;" begging timely notice so as duly to devise fit dressing for the part. It was Leech who, having just returned from seeing a bull-fight at Bayonne which had sickened and disgusted him, sent the Dean—with "hip! hip! hoo-ray" scrawled upon the margin—a fancy portrait of his first-born in the arms of its proud father; and designated pleasantly "the last New Rose—designed for the 'Gardener's Annual.'"

Many a happy day did the two friends spend together, until there came quite suddenly that saddest of all days to the survivor, when he read the service at the funeral of his friend, with tears of deepest heartfelt sorrow in his voice. "I said the Burial Office as best I could at the grave, which was close to Thackeray's and was surrounded by his friends. Looking up during the service, I was for a second startled to see what seemed to me at first an apparition, an exact likeness of what John Leech would have been had he lived to old age. It was his father, whom I had not met before. I pray, and hope, and believe that I shall meet his son, not by the gate of death but of life, when

With the morn those angel-faces smile,  
Which I have loved long since, and lost a while."

A hard worker himself, Dean Hole has naturally deep sympathy with real working men; true, honest, active workmen, and not the lazy bawlers, who pose upon the platforms as the mouthpiece of "the masses," or as the ill-fed—though plump—victims of the tyranny of trade. Such an orator the Dean describes as going

on the stump, and being neatly silenced by a sturdy blacksmith. The spouter was declaiming about the loathsome vampires who fattened on the labour of such martyrs as himself, the honest sons of toil. "You a labourer!" broke in the village Vulcan with great scorn; "the lord as had to live upon the labour of such a skulk as you, he wouldn't be a fat 'un!"

Drink and dirt are generally found together, and impurity of air may cause impurity of life. "You come and live in our court," exclaimed a slum-born sot to a friendly philanthropist, "and you'll soon take to the gin!" Bad food, too, like foul air, is provocative of drinking; and much misery might be cured by clever cookery and thrift. "If there were more wives who were good cooks," the Dean most sensibly remarks with all the emphasis of italics, "there would be more husbands at supper."

Like good Sir Walter Scott, the Dean delights in holding converse with poor people. Specially he notices their frequent use of Scripture phrases; which at times seem oddly out of place. Take, for instance, the old woman who had seen "a sight o' trouble," having lately lost her sister; and who lamented bitterly "a worse job nor that," for the pig had died "all of a sudden," it having, she said piously, "pleased the Lord to tak' 'im, and they mun bow, they mun bow!" And then there shone a gleam of sunshine upon her sad face as she added smilingly: "But there's one thing, Mestur Allen, as I can say, and ought to say; the Lord's been pratty well on my side this winter for greens!"

Rough men have rough manners, and tongues not always smooth. But though their hands are hard they often have soft hearts, and their gratitude is deeply felt, although it may be oddly shown. Such, for instance, as that of the poor villager, who, on recovery from illness, offered to go and "poach a little rabbit" for his reverence, whose visits he had highly valued. And the Dean gives a still better story of a clergyman, sitting late one Saturday in the quiet of his study—engaged doubtless on his sermon—when suddenly there entered a poor miner, who said very gravely: "Mester Whitworth, you've been very kind to my ould gal when she were sick so long abed, and I want to do yer a good turn, and I can do yer a good turn. There's going to be the gradliest dog-fight in this place to-morrow, and I can get yer into th' inner ring!"

Plain of speech, too, are poor people, and apt to pay small heed to the feelings of their hearers. Indeed, their want of tact is often quite remarkable, and their ways of putting things are devoid of much politeness. A district visitor, for instance, who had taken a short holiday, was greeted with what possibly was meant to be a compliment on her improved appearance. "Well, to be sure, ma'am, you do look a bit altered like; as I were a-sayin' to the Vicar on'y yest'day. 'Mrs. Dorcas,' I says, meanin' you, ma'am, 'she don't look near so old as when I last see her a-waistin'!" Knowing well the feminine weakness in respect of any personal reference to age, a French peasant never would have uttered such a doubtful compliment.

Nor are our poor folk much inclined to mincing matters in saying what they think. "You're looking fine and ill," is a frequent salutation. "Seems to me you're kind o' breakin' up like," is a phrase of friendly greeting not uncommon in East Anglia. "Well, Booth," began a sympathetic neighbour, "thee'd like to get better, wouldn't thee, Booth? But thee mun dee, this whet." Such cheerful words of comfort remind us of a talkative old alma-woman we lately met in Suffolk. Being asked what was the matter with her, she replied with great solemnity and scarce a pause in utterance: "Well, raly now, I can't say rightly, for I'm that full o' complaints, an' as neighbour Bildad was a-tellun me just by way o' comfort like, if it 'ud please the Lord to spare me till they all come to a point I'd be quite a curiosity an' wuth payin' to look at!"

Not being highly sensitive, poor folk pay little heed to the weakness of nerves of people less robust. Well might the timid Curate be startled by the ghastly message reaching him quite suddenly: "Please, sir, the corpse is waiting for you!" Nor could he have felt vastly anxious for the interview, when afterwards informed that the corpse's brother would be glad to have a word with him. Dark hints, too, of disaster are dropped in friendly intercourse, and seem to be much relished. In the reading of the newspaper, accounts of dreadful accidents are greedily spelled over, and still more welcome are the details of criminal reports. It can scarce have been good news to a tract-bearing, yet tender-hearted district visitor, to hear a poor sick woman tell her, as a proof of convalescence: "I find, ma'am, I begin more to enjoy them drefful murders!"

Poor people, like rich people, seldom lack sufficient courage to bear another's sufferings. But though awkward in their sympathy, and uncouth in its expression, they are usually generous and earnest in their help. A toothless old woman, who had listened very calmly to the pregnant words of "weeping and gnashing of teeth," was overheard complacently mumbling to herself, "Let 'em gnash 'em as 'as 'em!" Yet her apathy was probably the mere accident of age, and in her younger days she doubtless sat up all night long to nurse an ailing neighbour, nor would have spared herself much suffering to save her child from pain. The Dean tells a touching story of self-sacrifice, which he heard from his good friend Dr. Brown, who lived at Chatham once, before he went to Edinburgh, and there wrote so charmingly of "Rab" and other dogs. In the year '32 there was an outbreak of cholera, and Dr. Brown was summoned suddenly to a village on the Medway. As they neared the place, he saw an anxious crowd awaiting him, and before the boat touched shore, a big man plunged into the water, took the doctor on his back, and hurried him away to the bedside of a boy—the grandson of "Big Joe"—who lay stricken nigh to death. The lad was saved; the grandfather, exhausted by his effort and smitten by the malady, died that very night.

Merriment and wisdom are proverbially united, and happiness is mostly the result of good hard work. The Dean has little pity for people, rich or poor, whose discontent and selfish grumbling mainly springs from their own laziness; their whole lives being summed up in the poet's pregnant line:

Lives spent in indolence, and therefore sad.

To prove by simple contrast the wise truth which Cowper utters, we may take for our last extract a few words about a poor man with whom Dr. Brown, when on a visit to the Dean, took special pleasure in a talk. The good doctor first noticed him when hobbling to the village church with the help of two stout sticks, and crying out cheerily to an old fellow cripple who was using only one: "Why, Sammy, you're a poor crittur! Why don't you drive a pair like a gentleman?" "And surely no man," says the Dean, "could be more 'like a gentleman' than he who spoke those words. Not long before Dr. Brown's visit he came to me, as we were

going into church, and said: 'Do you think, sir, you could bring in that prayer about giving thanks this morning? I'm eighty years old to-day, and I should like to thank God for all the mercies He has been pleased to send.'"

"Thankful for small mercies," cynics possibly may sneer when they read the Dean's next words: "He had one room in a small cottage, his income was three shillings a week, he had no relations and few friends, he was often ailing and always infirm; and yet he had not only learned, in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content, but he was always happy."

Such wisdom may seem folly to selfish, idle grumblers, who wall over their worries and so increase their wretchedness. And the morallising pessimist, who doubts if life be much worth living, would certainly be sceptical of coupling it with happiness on three shillings a week. Nor, perhaps, might an agnostic, in his self-esteeming ignorance, put great faith in such a final scene of trusting peacefulness as that in which this poor old crippled happy peasant crept out of the world:

"He was a Christian in spirit and in truth, and the last words he spoke to me, just before his death, were these: 'I am not dying in darkness; I am dying in the light of life.'"

If only we had more of such good-hearted clergymen and such good honest poor folk, we might have fewer blatant demagogues and discontented beggars, and might find it far more easy to solve the labour question.

## AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY.

A COMPLETE STORY.

### CHAPTER I.

THE moonlight lay in vivid patches on the old house.

It was a long, low, red-brick structure, built in no particular style, and apparently in no particular reign. It was a jumble of different architecture. Here was a gable; there a turret; now a Norman gateway; here a Gothic one. It had been begun, added to, altered, pulled down, and built up again, till probably the old Norman arch which guarded the entrance to the grounds was the only bit of the original building left. Norman, Gothic, Tudor, Queen Anne—all went to make up a very charming whole—a whole covered with creepers, and trailing roses,



and starry jessamine. And in one of the quaint turret rooms of this odd building slept a girl.

It was a hot July night. The moon shone on the soft lawns and silvery fountain; then it crept up the stone steps to the terrace above, gay with the pale primrose which only opens its delicate petals to the wooing evening breeze; then on up the creeper-covered walls till it reached a casement window flung wide open to admit the flower-scented air. There it seemed to pause and explore.

It flung floods of light across a quaintly furnished room, rich with many an antique treasure, and seemed to centre all its brilliance on a white draped bed at the further end. There lay a girl.

She was asleep. Her lips were half parted to catch the scented night wind; her long lashes swept a delicate rose-tinted cheek. The moon showed how beautiful she was.

Presently she stirred uneasily, and finally sat up, her long, dark hair streaming over her snowy lace-trimmed draperies. She sat up with an intent expression on her face as though she were gazing at some object close at hand. But her eyes remained shut.

She became gradually more and more agitated, her hands were tightly clenched together, her face assumed a strange expression of fear, of anguish, of sadness.

Presently her eyes opened, but, only yet half awake, they gazed blankly out into the moonlit space. She seemed to be concentrating all her powers on one particular portion of the room.

Then she woke in reality, and the strained expression of anguish left her face, although the look of fear was still there.

"Again!" she said aloud. And she shuddered.

She had been gazing all through her sleep at a man's face. It was dark and pale, framed in masses of lustreless jet-black hair. It had a melancholy drooping mouth, and deep, dark, sombre eyes, as fathomless as mountain tarns on a sunless day.

It seemed close to her, and when she awoke and opened her eyes she thought for the moment that the dream face was real, that she had actually returned the strange, half passionate, half mocking gaze of those melancholy eyes.

For three weeks she had seen the face whenever she shut her eyes. And every

night she awoke, her eyes unclosing in spite of themselves at the bidding of that magnetic look.

She rose hastily from her bed, and throwing a light shawl on, went to the window and leaned out. One hand was pressed to her breast; the wild beating of her heart threatened to suffocate her.

The garden, fair and smiling, cool and peaceful, met her view. The scent of the starry jessamine floated towards her. The serene gaze of the stars seemed to still the fevered pulses.

"I am haunted, haunted!" she murmured to herself once or twice.

Then she laid her head down on the ledge of the window and burst into tears, sobbing like a frightened child.

"I am afraid!" she sobbed half aloud. And this time the serene glance of the stars seemed to mock her, and the gentle wind stirring the trembling leaves sent "light horrors" through her pulses.

She rose and paced wildly up and down the room. Every corner of it was bright as day.

"I must tell him. I cannot bear it alone," she thought. "He may laugh at it if he likes; but it is killing me. I cannot go on like this. I shall go mad!"

Almost involuntarily she shut her eyes—and the face came back to her. It remained so long in its clear persistency that she could gaze on it at will—always the same—pale to ghastliness, with its sweep of black hair, and its unhappy, sombre eyes.

"Good Heaven! Who can it be?" she cried in anguish. "I have never seen any one like that before."

She sat down again trembling from head to foot.

"Can I be really going mad?" she thought with a shudder. "I have read of people being haunted like this. But why should I be? I was happy till it came—and now my life is one long terror."

With a sudden movement she sank down on her knees beside the window, her eyes raised in appeal to the purple depth of vault behind which her childish faith told her that God dwelt.

She prayed long and earnestly for freedom from the terrible curse which had fallen upon her; prayed with innocent trust in the great God who watched unceasingly in the star-bespangled sky.

And as she prayed, the wooing wind kissed her cheek, the scent of the flowers

came to her as in a dream, a deep sense of peace and rest crept over her—and there, still in the same position, a suppliant at the foot of God's throne, she fell asleep, and dreamed of the face no more.

## CHAPTER II.

"DON'T laugh at me, Edwin. I can't bear it."

"My dear Violet, I am not laughing at you; but you take the thing too seriously altogether. I only want to show you how morbid and fanciful you are."

"It is not fancy, Edwin. I see it every night as plainly as I see you."

"Yes, yes, dear," he answered soothingly, though secretly alarmed at the deep-rootedness of her "fancy." "Of course you do, but heaps of people have vivid dreams."

"Not a dream like that. I tell you, Edwin, he wakes me every night by the power of his gaze."

"Violet, you are carrying this folly too far. You are indulging it, and the more you do that the stronger it will grow. You must not think about it, and then you will forget it."

She was silent for a moment. Then she said in a low voice:

"It has taken so strong a hold on me, Edwin, and made me so miserably terrified, that I have seriously thought of breaking off our engagement."

They were standing on the stone terrace watching the peacocks strutting to and fro below them, spreading their splendid tails and uttering harsh notes of pleasure at their own beauty. There was a rustic bench close by, and Edwin Armytage drew her gently to it.

"This has gone farther than I supposed, Violet," he said gravely, when they were seated, "and I must know more about it all. Forget that I am your lover, dear, and look upon me as a doctor only. When you have answered my questions perhaps I shall be able to give you something that will make these nightly terrors disappear like magic."

He drew her head down on to his shoulder, and she nestled to him with a sigh. It would be a relief to tell all her secret dread to Edwin.

"When did you first see the face, Violet?"

"About three weeks ago."

"By day or night?"

"In broad daylight. I had been sitting

reading, and suddenly grew tired, and laid the book down. I shut my eyes for a moment and the outlines of the face appeared. I was fascinated into watching it grow complete, it was so life-like."

"You had not been asleep? You are sure of it?"

"Quite sure."

"What book had you been reading—anything calculated to give rise to the fancy?"

"It was a volume of Tennyson's. I am positive the book had nothing to do with it. Edwin, if I do not get rid of it it will kill me! I dread the night so horribly."

"We will get rid of it, never fear," he said cheerily. "What a nervous, excitable little woman it is! And so this is what has been making the pretty cheeks so pale and the pretty eyes so heavy. Why, in a week's time you will be laughing at yourself! It is just indigestion and nervousness, my dear Violet. I shall give you a sleeping draught to-night, and to-morrow your white-faced, black-haired friend will have disappeared."

He laughed lightly.

"So you were actually going to give me up for your dream hero," he said cheerfully. "That is not a strong proof of your constancy, is it?"

But she could not laugh just yet. She had unburdened herself of her secret, but she had not got rid of her strong impression of haunting terror.

"It is so real," she said.

For a moment, in the brilliant dancing sunlight, with her lover by her side and all the cheerful sounds and sights of daylight around her, her thoughts flew swiftly back to the moonlit room and the strange foreign face. She dared not shut her eyes for fear that she might see it again.

"Of course it seems real, Violet, but you must try and be sensible, you know. It really only requires a strong effort of will—and a little help on my part," said Dr. Edwin Armytage, taking out his pocket-book and scribbling a prescription on one of its leaves. "That is a sleeping draught that will mean death to your Byronic nightly visitor," he added, as he gave it her. "Cheer up, Vi, he will not live much longer."

She took the paper and smiled faintly. She could not echo his cheerful words, or look lightly back at the vision which had so terrified her.

But she took the draught that night and

slept a deep and dreamless sleep, haunted by no evil or terrifying visions. She had a faint bloom of colour on her cheek when she met her lover the next day.

"So," he said, pinching her cheek, "we have made short work of him, I can see. Little goose, to be so easily frightened!"

Violet Lonsdale was her old self again that day, and went to bed without even a thought of her midnight visitor. Her last remembrance was of Edwin's smile and handclasp as he bade her good-bye.

But that night she saw the face again. Pale, stern, implacable as ever, gazing at her with burning, sombre eyes, which seemed to fasten themselves upon her very soul and compel its awakening. And she awoke, terrified as before.

This time she did not pray. She felt stupefied, fascinated, helpless. It was as though a snake had fixed its eyes upon her and thrown her into a trance of dumb terror.

"He has been again? Very persistent, I must say!" said Dr. Armytage with forced gaiety, as he came to pay his daily visit.

"Yes," said Violet in a crushed, lifeless voice. "It is no use, Edwin. And I have told papa. I am not going to marry you. I shall only grow worse, and, perhaps, even go mad."

"This is not like you, Violet. You are generally sensible."

"I cannot struggle any more," she answered dully.

He looked at her with a sudden pang. Her eyes were blank and hopeless, her cheeks hollow, her whole expression one of strained anguish. He recognised that the case was getting serious, and that strong measures must be taken at once. Her life, perhaps her reason, was at the mercy of this morbid hallucination. He bent over her and took her hand in his.

"Listen, Violet," he said firmly; "you have trust in me, have you not?"

"Yes; but you cannot help me here," she answered.

He controlled his impatience.

"I am going to alter your prescription, Violet," he said gently, "and order you something that will cure you. I swear it will cure you!" he cried with sudden passion.

She smiled listlessly.

"I will take whatever you like," she said, the blank look stealing over her eyes again.

"You are suffering from disordered

nervous imagination," he said. "You must travel—see different people—undergo constant change of scene. It is essential for you. Do you understand me, Violet? This queer old house and the strange room you persist in sleeping in are having a bad effect upon you."

"How can I travel?" said Violet, showing faint interest for a moment. "Papa is too old, and I cannot go alone."

"You shall go with me. I will devote myself to you. Marry me at once, Violet, and I promise you you shall never be troubled again."

A blush spread over her cheek. The suddenness of the idea seemed to rouse her from her lethargy.

"Will you, Violet?" he urged. "I will do all I can to make you happy."

It was long before she would consent, but at last his reasoning and his pleading and his passion overcame her. And, absorbed in this new joy, in the trembling, blissful thoughts of the fulness of life that was to come, the dream face vanished, swallowed up in the reality of her happiness.

She saw it no more till the night before her wedding-day. Then it seemed to have a slow, mocking, triumphant look in the steady gaze of its burning, sombre eyes.

### CHAPTER III.

"ARE you not glad you took my advice, Violet, and came abroad with me instead of moping yourself to death in that dismal old house of yours?"

"Very glad," she answered with a little grateful smile.

"And you are happy, sweetest?"

"Almost too happy, dear. It is too good to last."

They were quiet, each full of silent love for the other. They had been abroad for eight months, and had not yet wearied of this protracted honeymoon. During the whole of that time, Violet's peace had not once been disturbed by the vision of that nightly visitor. She was almost disposed, looking back at her terror through a long, dim vista of happy, golden days, to laugh at it herself. But she had suffered too much to even care to think of it at all. It was past—it was gone.

They had wandered through Switzerland and France; they had made a leisurely tour through Germany, and now they were to finish up their long holiday with a glimpse of romantic Italy. Edwin

had a fancy for seeing Rome and the Carnival.

A week later, and they stood at the window of their hotel, gazing out on the strange motley crowd, with their odd dresses, their painted faces—every eccentricity that human beings could devise finding a place in that curious throng. Violet and her husband stood side by side, laughing lightly at it all.

"What guys people can make of themselves!" she said. "I never could have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my very own eyes."

"You will have something to tell your poor old dad about when next you write home," he said, slipping his arm round her waist.

They stood silently for a moment looking at the strange scene. A painted cart was going slowly by, drawn by great sleek oxen with gaily gilded horns. They had wreaths of scented flowers flung round their soft necks; the inhabitants of the car were fantastically dressed in the garb of Neapolitan peasants, and they wore nodding pasteboard donkeys' heads upon their shoulders. The effect was grotesque in the extreme.

"What should we say to all this folly and nonsense in sober England?" he asked, laughing.

She made no response, except by leaning heavily against him, and he turned to look at her in some surprise. She was deadly white.

"Look!" she cried in a perfect frenzy of terror, pointing with her finger at the seething crowd below. "There it is again! The face! the face!"

He looked hastily in the direction where her finger pointed, but could distinguish nothing amid that moving mass of masks and faces.

He turned again to Violet to chide her vivid fancy. She had fainted.

In the midst of the multitude of moving beings, she had clearly distinguished the face of the man who had haunted her previously. It seemed to have sprung forth in all its pallid clearness, and to her the gay crowd melted away for a moment, leaving her face to face, soul to soul, with this man. His eager, burning, sombre eyes sprang to meet her gaze, and held her spirit in some magic spell.

When she recovered she found herself lying on the sofa with Edwin kneeling by her side, and the scent of eau-de-cologne in the air.

"Are you better?" he asked her anxiously.

She did not answer for a moment. Then she made an attempt to struggle into a sitting posture. He gently prevented her.

"Lie still, dear," he said. "It was the heat of the room that made you faint."

He hoped for a moment that she had forgotten the cause of her illness.

"It was not the room," she said, speaking with some difficulty, a tense expression of horror dilating her dark eyes.

"It was the face again! Oh, Edwin, I thought I was free, and now—now I have actually seen him! I am so frightened!" She began to sob convulsively. "Just as I have seen him always—so pale and terrible, and his eyes!"—She shuddered. "How soon can we get away from here, Edwin?" she asked.

"Dearest Violet, you are not strong enough to go just yet. When you are better we will start for home. But you must not think you have seen the reality of your dream, that would be too absurd. It was just a little return of your old trouble, and it will go as easily as it did before."

"Ah, you don't understand," cried Violet despairingly. "Oh, I dare not stay here—in the same town with him! When I am better? I am better now, Edwin—I shall always be strong enough to get away from that. See!"

She struggled off the sofa, and made a few uncertain steps in the direction of the door, laughing weakly. As he caught her in his arms she fainted again. This time he carried her to bed and gave her a sleeping draught. When he saw her breathing lightly and regularly he returned to the sitting-room with a puzzled brow.

Was it only her vivid fancy, that amongst the crowd of grotesque faces she should recognise that mystic dream face that had haunted her so long—or had she seen some one who really resembled the vision? He could not tell, but he was uneasy at this return of his wife's hallucination: He fancied that he had battled with and slain it, and here it was raising its Medusa-like head again!

"Never mind," he thought patiently to himself; "love conquered it before, and love shall conquer it again. Violet has very highly-strung nerves."

An hour later, when he came back from another visit to his wife's bedside, he



found a telegram for him. It was to announce the death of his father, and urge his immediate presence in England.

He threw the telegram down, half stunned with the news, and the complications that might follow it. He must go to his mother at once. He was the only son and there were many things to be seen to. But what about Violet? He decided to tell her when she awoke. It was too late to start that day.

She awoke extremely weak, but calmer and more cheerful, and he deemed it prudent to break the news at once. The distressed look came over her face again.

"Must you go, Edwin?"

"Dearest, it is absolutely necessary. There is no way out of it. I only wish you were strong enough to come with me."

She clung to him terrified.

"You cannot mean to leave me, Edwin? In a strange place and alone."

"I can be there and back in four days, Violet. Four days is a very short time, and you will be quite safe. Nobody will run away with you, and I will ask the Markhams to come and see you often."

The Markhams were an English family who lived a short way off.

But Violet was not to be consoled.

"I shall die of terror, Edwin. You must let me come too."

"My own darling, you must be reasonable. How can you endure the hurry and bustle of rapid travelling when you are as weak and upset as this? A house of death would be the worst place possible to take you to. I could not think of it. You must be guided by me, Violet. I thought you would be more sensible."

He did not speak harshly, but his mind was too occupied with the thought of his father's death and his journey to England for him to be quite as tender and considerate as usual. And she needed it more.

She was resigned at last, and after saying that she should not put her foot outside the hotel till he came back, and that she should be abjectly miserable and horribly frightened, she allowed him to depart. It is true she clung to him with passionate tenderness when they said good-bye, but she made no scene, nor did she shed a single tear.

After all, four days are not an eternity!

The landlord smiled slightly as he saw the farewell, and heard Edwin's recommendation of perfect quiet.

"These English are jealous husbands," he thought to himself, "but then they sometimes love their wives! The signora is very pretty. It is to be hoped she is always discreet."

Violet had determined to bear her husband's departure well, and she did so. It is true she was a little pale and heavy-eyed, and refused to leave the hotel to join any of the Markhams' pleasure-parties; but then what is more natural than that a young wife shall look distressed when her husband leaves her, and when her father-in-law has just died? The Markhams found such grief very proper and quite interesting. They went to see Violet once a day, and found her more cheerful each time. Every day brought her nearer to her beloved Edwin.

On the night he was to return she decked the room with flowers—great bowls of pale primroses and violets, her sweet namesakes—till it looked like a bower of blossoms. She paused at last, with her hands full of the scented petals, tired out.

The door softly opened and shut. She looked round—she had heard the approaching footsteps—and—behold! She was face to face with the man of her dream.

She sank back, the flowers still in her hand.

The burning eyes fastened themselves upon her face.

An hour afterwards Edwin Armytage entered the hotel. It struck him once that the landlord and the waiters looked at him rather curiously; but he passed them by and ran lightly up the stairs to their sitting-room. Some undefined and awful dread seized upon his soul as he saw that the room was empty. The carpet had quite a little track of tinted petals on it, the room was full of the sweet floral decorations. He took in with a pang the loving care she had spent in arranging this welcome for him.

He opened the door of their bedroom, expecting to find her there, with love shining from her sweet eyes. It was empty also!

Then he rushed like a madman down the stairs, and seized upon the landlord; the mark of his fingers on the latter's arm as he clutched it in the extremity of his anguish did not disappear for a week.

"Where is my wife?" he demanded hoarsely.

The landlord retreated a little before those feverish eyes.

"The signora went out half an hour ago, signor," he answered discreetly.

"Went out? With whom?"

There was a little crowd round them by this time, but Edwin did not heed their curious gaze.

"The signora went out with—with a gentleman," said Senesca, hesitating out of pure pity for this injured husband. "She may return soon," he added soothingly.

He knew the English when roused might be dangerous, and he had no wish to have tragedies enacted in his splendid hotel.

Edwin did not speak, but something in his eyes impelled Senesca to hurriedly tell him all he knew.

He was sorry for the loving husband whose wife had run off with another man!

"Signor, half an hour ago, a plain black carriage with two black horses drew up at the door. A gentleman sprang out, and went straight up the stairs to the signora's apartments. He seemed to know his way quite well," said Senesca, with a glance at Edwin to see how he was taking this, "and asked for no directions. Signor, in a few minutes the signora descended the staircase on his arm. She was closely veiled, and walked with difficulty. It seemed to me that she was pale and weeping. But she went of her own free will, and it was no business of mine to interfere. They entered the carriage, signor, and were driven rapidly away. I do not know in which direction."

Edwin's white lips had only one more despairing question to ask. He knew what the answer to it would be.

"What was he like?"

"Signor, he was tall and distinguished, with a pale face and strange, burning eyes. It would appear that no one in the hotel recognised him."

Edwin pushed the man aside and dashed out into the street.

"His wife has been unfaithful to him," said the landlord, with a little explanatory shrug of his shoulders to the bystanders. "These English are mad where they love. He will put a bullet through his brain,

And the signora looked so sweetly innocent. Who would have thought it?"

To-day, thirty years after the strange event took place of which I have written, there wanders over the surface of the earth a man with snow-white hair and restless, searching eyes. He has spent his life, his health, his fortune, in travelling from one place to another, ever seeking for what he will never find.

It is Edwin Armytage, and he is looking for the lost bride of his happy youth. But he will never find her. He is also looking for a man with a white face, black, lustreless hair, and burning, sombre eyes.

But he has never found him either, nor will he ever, for the mystery remains unsolved until this day, and the white-haired, restless man must find peace soon in the bosom of the quiet earth, wherein we all must sleep some day.

Only it is his prayer that he may find his Violet first.

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## IN TITANIA'S BOWER.

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CALENDAR FOR 1893.

## IN TITANIA'S BOWER.

### CHAPTER I. A FOREST HOME.

"I THINK you had better give up your search, Osmond," said Lady Gilchurch, in a voice of languid sweetness.

The voice accorded with the face and figure of its owner as she lay back in the phaeton her son was driving—a handsome youth of some fourteen or fifteen summers.

"No, I won't," replied the youth doggedly. "There can't be more than one such girl in the forest. And I know her name; it is Titania."

"That is a name out of a book," said Lady Gilchurch, yawning.

"Anyhow, it is good enough for me," replied her son, with enigmatic curtness. "If there were only some one to ask!"

They had been driving along an apparently interminable road that, reared straight up on end before them, had the appearance of a gap in the hillside; but now they had reached the crest of the hill, and they saw stretched before them a veritable forest scene. Tufted masses of verdure, bathed in sunshine, stretched in velvet softness as far as the eye could reach, except where Southampton Water lost itself in the shimmering haze of the sea-

line. More to the purpose as a foreground, in the dip of the road appeared a gipsy cart drawn up on the turf—a smart and neat-looking vehicle, from the iron funnel of which rose a column of blue smoke against the dark foliage of a group of aged oaks.

"Shall I tell your fortune, my darling gentleman?" cried a fine, dark gipsy girl, coming forward to the carriage. "You were born under a lucky star, it is easy to see, my handsome gentleman! There is a beautiful young lady with golden locks who is looking out for you."

"Is there?" cried the boy. "That is just what I wanted to know. Here, hold the reins, mother; I must have a talk to this girl!" He soon came back to the carriage, smiling. "Well, I have found out all about Titania," he said; "and she knows a lot, does that girl, I can tell you."

Titania was the latest of young Lord Camlan's fancies. On the previous day, when fishing the stream that ran by Ambrehurst, without success and heartily tired of the whole business, he met on the banks a young girl who was pursuing the same sport, but with better results. And she was so friendly and jolly, and so ready to give the less practised piscator the benefit of her experience, that she at once won the boy's heart. It was the jolliest

time possible he had with her, only it was too short; and his companion had laughingly eluded all his attempts to find out where she lived, except that she owned to being a forester. Nor would she promise to meet him again on the river.

Following the gipsy's directions, Osmond turned off along a green drive, which he followed to a white gate, which was locked, and stopped the further progress of the carriage.

Having vaulted over the white gate, Osmond pursued a narrow track, beyond which appeared an old stone gateway, green with moss and lichen, and stained with many marks of wind and weather, but still stout and serviceable, with massive stone piers, each surmounted by some rampant animal of heraldic species. An elaborately-twisted iron grille, showing here and there traces of tarnished gilding, closed the solid gateway. There was no bell to be seen; and if there had ever been a bugle-horn hanging to the gate, as its antique appearance suggested, it had vanished.

Osmond vigorously shook the gate, and suddenly a dark face appeared at the wicket—a face surmounted by dark frizzled locks and a red "fez."

"What shall you want?" asked the new-comer concisely, and in no friendly tone.

"Perhaps you are Mr. Herondale?" said Osmond, who had been duly instructed by the gipsy.

"No, no!" said the other, as if irritated at the supposition. "You cannot see him. He is not well sufficiently to see anybody."

"But my visit is to Miss Herondale," said Osmond boldly. "Please give her my mother's card, and tell her I—Lord Camlan—am waiting to see her."

The other scrutinised the pasteboard mistrustfully, and scrutinised the visitor, too, from top to toe, the yellow "whites" of his eyes gleaming as he rolled his eyeballs up and down.

"Well, you can enter," he said at last, and pulled a cord which brought upon the scene an elderly but brisk-looking manservant, who, in obedience to a gesture from the other, unlocked the gate, and admitting Lord Camlan, led the way into a quiet grassy courtyard, with a mossy sun-dial in the middle. At the further end was a balustraded terrace, with broad marble steps, over which rose the ivy-covered gables of an ancient mansion. Up the marble steps went the serving man,

and entered the hall that opened from the terrace—an oaken-panelled hall, cool and even chilly at this uncertain time of year, and crossing the hall, he led the way through a fine doorway of black oak into a charming old-fashioned garden sloping to the south, where the light and colour and brilliance of the scene was almost overpowering in contrast with the gloom behind it. The central figure was Titania, seated in a wicker throne near the marble basin of a fountain, the dancing spray of which took rainbow hues in the sunshine—hues that were repeated in the iridescent tail of a proud peacock who sunned himself below, attended by his sober-coloured dames.

Titania herself was fair and petite, with frizzy golden curls about her forehead, a saucy nose, full ripe lips, and well-rounded chin. At her feet crouched a negro girl, black but comely, whose dark polished skin and black glistening hair contrasted with the other's fairness of hue and raiment. Scattered about the human group were two or three terriers and a large lemon-coloured and white dog of the St. Bernard breed. There was also a large, silky Persian cat, and some white tumbler pigeons fluttered in security about the fountain. Then there was a background of fantastically-clipped holly, box, and yew—shady arbours, battlemented turrets, globes, and pyramids, cunningly carved by the gardeners' shears—and in one corner, overtopping the great holly hedge that enclosed everything, stood a building that at first sight appeared incongruous with the rest, a kind of Moorish kiosk, with horseshoe arches and gilded arabesques, with a dome above and gilt pinnacles all very rich and glittering.

Seated among her court Titania looked so much more grown-up and formidable than as Osmond had seen her, with a fish basket over her shoulder, and in a short homespun skirt, that an unusual feeling of shyness came over him. The dogs, however, covered the confusion of his apologies by their noisy greetings, and Titania recognised him with a pleased smile.

"Then you have found me out. What a clever boy you must be!" she cried, holding out a hand.

"Give me something harder than that," said Osmond, laughing. "Everybody knows the queen of the forest."

"Ah, you have been with Sidonia, the gipsy," said Titania quickly; "that is her



flowery way of talking. But how did you manage to get through the gate?"

"A dark man in a red cap let me through," said Lord Camlan.

"Ah, that was Bensadi," said Titania. "It is a wonder he did not send you away. You see," she added, in an explanatory way, "my father is a great invalid, and it is necessary to keep the place very quiet. But I have my 'at homes' like everybody else, only not here, but in the forest at a place Sidonia calls my bower. Oh, yes, I will show you the place some day, and then you can come and see me without encountering Bensadi."

Osmond replied that he would appreciate the privilege immensely.

"But first," said Titania, "you must be introduced to my friends here. This young lady with the ebony locks is Cobweb—Cobweb, permit me to present to you Lord Camlan."

Cobweb showed her pearly teeth in a pleasant smile, and nodded her head till the gold rings in her ears tinkled like little bells. She wore heavy gold bangles, too, about her wrists, and a gold collar round her neck, and in a tunic of amber silk, with a crimson girdle and turban, was a very bright and radiant-looking creature indeed.

"And now for the dogs. The big one is Rollo—go and shake hands, Rollo; as for the little ones we call them by any name that comes handy; but now that they know you they will be friendly when we meet again."

Once on a friendly footing with all concerned, the moments flew like lightning for Lord Camlan. Titania, too, was charmed with her new companion. She had always longed to have a friend, and a nice boy like this was everything desirable. She received him unquestioningly as a gift from the gods; and she had all kinds of things to say to him. Cobweb brought coffee, cakes, and sweetmeats, and then amused them with little feats of dexterity, such as keeping half-a-dozen biscuits dancing in the air and rivalling the fountain in their graceful movements, till they disappeared one by one between Cobweb's strong white teeth. And then Cobweb brought out a Moorish mandolin, and sang little ditties in an unknown tongue, with a plaintive, tinkling refrain.

"How pleased mother will be with Cobweb!" cried Osmond enthusiastically, and then he started. He had forgotten

all about Lady Gilchurch, who was waiting for him all this time.

"You wicked boy," cried Titania, laughing at his remorseful face. "But why did you leave her outside?"

"Could she climb the five-barred gate?" asked Osmond reproachfully.

"True; I forgot that you did not know the secret. Perhaps I had better show it you, and we will make our excuses to your mother."

Titania rose attended by her little court, by Cobweb, by the dogs, even by the pigeons that fluttered high above her head, and, as she entered the house, threw joyous somersaults over the roofs and chimney-stacks. The peacock remained behind, contenting himself by giving a few guttural cries, and spreading his tail like a fan in honour of the departing procession.

"This is the shorter way," said Titania, avoiding the hall and unlocking and opening a door that gave upon a long gallery lighted from above, and covered with soft matting. Here were a number of casts, fragments of antique sculpture, and, conspicuous among them all, a female figure in marble, roughly blocked out as to the lower part, but showing a remarkably beautiful face and bust, which had evidently received the sculptor's finishing touches.

Osmond involuntarily paused before this work of art, struck by some indefinite but powerful chord of memory or imagination.

"My father's last work," said Titania, in a low voice; "he will never finish it now; but come quickly, for I think I hear his footstep, and it will distress him to find us here."

After all Osmond need not have hurried away on his mother's account. The groom stood before his horses, which were discussing the contents of the nosebags he had thoughtfully provided for them. But the carriage was empty, and a glance towards the greenwood showed a pair of dark figures conversing earnestly together under the shade of a fine old beech. One of the figures, conspicuous for its red cap, was clearly Bensadi, and as evidently Lady Gilchurch was the other. The slight turmoil of Titania's procession attracted their attention, and they turned and walked slowly back towards the carriage, where Bensadi quitted my lady with a low salaam and glided away towards the house.

"And you are Titania!" said Lady Gilchurch, impressing a cold kiss on her forehead. "I have heard all about you, dear, from your good Mr. Bensadi, and I hope we shall be very great friends. I shall send Osmond to fetch you soon for a long visit." The words were friendly and even affectionate, but the manner was strangely repressed, and conveyed a feeling of constraint with all its apparent warmth.

#### CHAPTER II. A FAMILY MYSTERY.

DURING the drive home to Ambrehurst Lady Gilchurch was unusually grave and thoughtful, and gave only absent-minded replies to the light-hearted talk of her son, who was in the highest spirits at the success of the expedition; and as soon as she arrived at her own house, she made for Lord Gilchurch's apartments. In a general way Lord Gilchurch hated to be disturbed during the afternoon, when he was supposed to be engaged in writing his "Memoirs," a book that, as he had seen a good deal of the world, and had a memory well stocked with stories more or less scandalous, was looked for with some anxiety. But Lord Gilchurch was always polite to his wife, and dismissing his secretary by a glance which conveyed a sense of subdued annoyance, he turned to his lady with a pleasant smile.

"You are just come at the right time, my dear," he said. "I have reached that point in my memoirs where I am sent as special envoy to Morocco, and all kinds of charming reminiscences are evoked by the thought that it was there I saw you for the first time. But, upon my word, you are even still more charming now."

Lady Gilchurch frowned. "I think, my lord," she said icily, "that you might spare me these memories of degradation."

"Degradation, nonsense!" said Lord Gilchurch airily. "There is nothing degrading in being sold as a slave. It is the fortune of war and might happen to any of us. It is something to be worth buying."

"Without entering into that, Lord Gilchurch, I have to tell you of something serious. Herondale is living and not far from here, but his mind completely gone."

"Well, why should you concern yourself about him?" asked Lord Gilchurch testily.

"There is a girl," continued Lady Gilchurch, "a girl two years older than Osmond, and the boy is full of a romantic attachment for her, and he insists on my asking her to stay with us. Will it be safe?"

"Why not?" replied Lord Gilchurch calmly. "By all means have the girl here and make much of her. You owe her a little reparation, perhaps, and I am much mistaken if she has not a grown-up sweet-heart already."

"You know more than I do, it seems, about the matter," rejoined the Countess suspiciously.

"In the most natural way in the world! Captain Rohan, who is a far away cousin, is, it seems, stationed with his battery or troop, or whatever he calls it, at Christchurch. He has just honoured me with a call with his friend Wimpole, an army surgeon, I fancy, and as it happens the son of my old friend Dr. Wimpole, who was once physician to the Embassy. And Rohan hoped you would call upon this Miss Herondale, who lives in rather an isolated position, with an invalid father; and the household practically ruled by one Bensadi, of whom perhaps Rohan is jealous. But you might ask them here, Rohan and his friend, while the girl is with us."

Lady Gilchurch nodded assent to this, or at all events acquiescence.

"It might be a good match for Rohan," said Lord Gilchurch judicially. "That is if there's a will—as there ought to be—and so on, for I'm told that Herondale inherited all his uncle's immense fortune."

"Was it so great, then?" said Lady Gilchurch gloomily.

"I ought to know something about it," said the Earl, falling into his easy narrative vein, "for Tom Herondale's affairs were the subject of certain secret negotiations in which I was concerned. Herondale, you must know, was brought up as an engineer, and being of an adventurous turn he took service with the Shereef and Kaid of Omazan, which is a tributary state to Morocco, the then Shereef being a man reputedly of advanced ideas, who meant to have waterworks, gaslights, and all such Western notions in his capital. But when Herondale arrived he found that this was all make-believe. The Shereef was full of ambitious notions, but not in that direction. He wanted guns and ships, having a design to save his tribute to the head Sultan, and perhaps to take his place. For he was one of the highest swells in the Mohammedan faith, and thousands of fanatical tribesmen looked upon him as the coming chief of their religion and race. Well, he hadn't got the ships and guns, but he had the money to buy them. He was the possessor of an

immense treasure. It is said that one of his ancestors had come across the hoarded wealth of some Phœnician colony long ages ago destroyed in some barbarian irruption. Anyhow, there was the treasure, gold in ingots by the ton weight, diamonds, pearls—untold wealth, in fact. Well, the Shereef was uneasy about his treasure, for he knew that the Sultan at Fez had got wind of it, and knowing the skill of English engineers, he had got Tom Herondale out there to make him a treasure house that even if discovered should be impregnable to any assailants.

"Tom saw that this was a dangerous business, but he set to work and finished the shop after a couple of years' hard work. The Shereef was mightily pleased, loaded Tom with presents, and sent him to the coast with an escort of trusty tribesmen. Trusty enough they must have been, for they had secret instructions to put Tom out of the way and bring back the plunder. But some young woman about the Shereef's household had taken a fancy to the young Englishman and warned him of the plot. And so he gave his friends the slip, reached the coast in safety, got on board an English ship, and landed on Blackwall Pier without even sixpence in his pocket to pay his fare to London. However, he soon got employment at so much a week, and living on crusts and tobacco smoke, put by nearly all he earned.

"In the meantime, the Sultan, convinced of the existence of the treasure, demanded an immense sum from his tributary, and, not getting it, carried fire and sword into the Shereef's territory. He took him prisoner, too, and doubtless would have extracted his secret, but the poor Shereef took poison and escaped the torture. And the Sultan never got that treasure, although it is believed that many poor wretches perished for not revealing a secret they knew nothing about."

"But somebody must have known," said the Countess listlessly. "There were workmen, no doubt."

"A curious kind of epidemic had carried off the few who were employed. No, as I understand, the secret of the treasure house was confined to the Shereef Omar and Tom Herondale. Well, Tom worked at his bench, or whatever you call it, for five years, living in the same frugal way. At the end of that time he had saved two hundred and fifty pounds; and with that he went on his travels. He came back in

two years' time a rich man. He went into Parliament, was made a baronet, and so on. About that time I went to Morocco to negotiate a commercial treaty. Said the Sultan in effect: 'Find me the English engineer who made a treasure house for the Shereef of Omazan, and you shall have your treaty.' We were obliged to say in our diplomatic way that we should have great pleasure in looking for him if he would give us more precise indications. But the old Sultan only shook his head, and we did not get our treaty. I met Sir Thomas soon after in the lobby of the House, and told him of the Sultan's pleasant request. He looked rather blue, I assure you."

"But why should he look blue? and of what use would he have been to the Sultan?" asked Lady Gilchurh artlessly.

"Well, do you suppose that he took away all the treasure? Why, it must have amounted to millions to have justified the Shereef's ambitious plans. And think how much gold would weigh to the value of even a hundred thousand pounds. Why, a ton, at least, a load for ten mules. And consider the difficulty of getting even such a train as that across a wild, unsettled country, where every tribal chief levies blackmail. I doubt whether Tom Herondale took anything but the jewels which he could conceal about him."

"Well, the end of it all is," said the Countess, "that I am to ask Titania and these other people."

"Oh, yes; why not?" said Lord Gilchurh.

And so before night the Countess had despatched a formal invitation to Titania at Bolder Hatch, and the same messenger had charge of another missive addressed to Joseph Bensadi, Esq., with instructions to deliver it into no other hands but his. This latter note was written in Arabic characters, and would not have been easily read by any one but Bensadi himself. It was to this effect: "You are on the right track; pursue it and let your unhappy sister pursue hers. Peace be with you."

Short as was the note, it gave Bensadi much material for consideration. And here it may be as well to explain the exact position that Bensadi occupied at Bolder Hatch. He was not a constant resident there; he occupied chambers in an old city nook, where he lived and carried on the ostensible occupation of a dealer in Oriental wares—chiefly drugs, gums, and spices, but also in gems,

enamel, and Moorish pottery. To his chambers resorted at times all kinds of curious people from the East—swarthy Berbers in white turbans and long caftans; turbaned Jews, whose traditions went back to the Moorish kingdoms of Spain and the glories of the ancient Alhambra; Arabs of the true faith from all the corners of the earth. Mysterious intelligence, flashed round the world from unknown sources, found a focus at Bensadi's; and few striking events took place, whether in the far interior of Africa, or on the burning plains of the Soudan, or among the marble palaces and jewelled thrones of India, without reaching the cognisance of Bensadi's circle, and generally long before they were known to the world in general.

As for Bensadi's origin, it was said that he had been sold when a boy as a slave in the market at Fez, and purchased with his sister, a beautiful young thing, and had been bought at a high price by an agent on behalf of Sir Thomas Herondale, who had caused them to be shipped to England, where they had been, after a fashion, adopted by that wealthy but eccentric baronet.

In course of time Bensadi had obtained a great influence over his benefactor. The young Arab professed to have inherited the knowledge of certain recondite secrets, by means of which human life might be preserved to an almost fabulous age and pristine vigour continued to the very end. That was an attractive programme for Sir Thomas, who, however, notwithstanding Bensadi's care, died at the age of only seventy years, leaving as his only testamentary paper a memorandum, stating that as Bensadi had promised to prolong his life to the age of the early patriarchs, there was no need to think of making a will for the next hundred years or so. Thus everything Sir Thomas possessed went to his sole surviving relative, Stanley Herondale, the sculptor.

If Bensadi felt some natural chagrin at his benefactor's want of consideration, he did not allow it to influence his conduct to his successor. Stanley Herondale, when he succeeded unexpectedly to his uncle's wealth, had passed through a period of storm and stress that had apparently unhinged him for the practical business of life.

Originally Herondale had appeared to be one of fortune's favourites. Of an hereditary genius for art, he had followed

his father's profession of a sculptor, and had acquired some fame and success at an early age, while his handsome person and winning manners had made him a favourite in the highest circles. Proud of his nephew, Sir Thomas showered all kinds of benefits upon him, and made him a munificent allowance. But a fatal curiosity led the sculptor one day to visit Bolder Hatch, a property which his uncle had purchased as a residence for a beautiful girl, Amina, who, according to report, was being trained and educated to become his wife when the process of rejuvenescence should have been duly accomplished. Herondale gained admittance to the lady's bower, and her dazzling beauty inspired him with an overwhelming passion. An elopement was the result, followed, it was thought, by a private marriage, of which, however, no evidence had been forthcoming.

Sir Thomas, naturally outraged by these proceedings, at once repudiated his nephew and cut off his allowance. Herondale, who continued to live at an extravagant rate, although he had now only his art to support it, soon fell into dire embarrassment. Amina, who believed herself to be the cause of his ruin, and perhaps thought that without her he might be able to retrieve his position, disappeared from his house, having first, however, obtained a promise from Sir Thomas to provide for her child, the infant Titania, then just a year old. From that time forth nothing more was heard of Amina, and Herondale was in no condition to pursue any researches as to her fate. He had fallen into a state of profound melancholy and dejection, during which he attempted to end his existence by poison; but Bensadi had kept an eye upon him, and came to his rescue. By his skilful treatment and the antidotes he administered Herondale's life was preserved, and Bensadi provided for his wants till his uncle's death put him in possession of a large fortune.

But the influence that Bensadi had obtained over him still continued paramount. To those about him Herondale now appeared as a mere automaton, moved hither and thither at the will of Bensadi, or of Mustafa, who was Bensadi's bond-slave and shadow, and who had been appointed Mr. Herondale's personal attendant. What they wished him to say he said, to write he wrote; but there seemed to be little volition of his own in the matter.



For about two years Mr. Herondale had been in possession of Bolder Hatch, where Titania had lived from her childhood. Sir Thomas had always provided liberally for her bringing-up and maintenance. A clever and accomplished woman, Miss Dexter, had taken charge of her education at a liberal salary. There was a strong affection between teacher and pupil, and when Miss Dexter's functions ceased on the new household being formed, the separation was a great blow to both of them.

Yet Bensadi had proved himself a very liberal and amiable guardian. Titania loved horses and rode fearlessly and well. Bensadi had taken care that the stables should be well filled, and Titania had her own hunter, and went out with the New Forest hounds whenever their meet was near at hand. On one of these occasions, when the fox had led the way through a line of country quite unfamiliar to her, Titania nearly came to grief in a deep watercourse which her horse had failed to clear, and she was rescued from her dangerous position by a young officer from Christchurch barracks, who had witnessed the accident, and who gallantly plunged into deep water to rescue her. The two young people, thrown together in this unconventional way, conceived a sudden attachment for each other. In her walks and drives she was constantly meeting with Captain Rohan, who, however, met with no success in his attempts to storm the citadel of Bolder Hatch. All his attempts to cultivate the acquaintance of Mr. Herondale were repulsed with coldness. Bensadi was at the gate whether he came early or late.

But Rohan had enjoyed one sweet stolen interview with Titania in her favourite forest haunt. She had shown him the way to it once, but had laughingly told him that he would never be able to find it again, and to his vexation Rohan found this to be the case, else it was a sufficiently remarkable place, being a circular clearing in the midst of a thick growth of old yews and thorn-trees—probably the most ancient of all the forest trees then growing, and that might have seen Rufus and his train when they went out to hunt the red deer. There were traces of an earthen rampart rising out of a kind of sunken basin, and in the centre of the circle was a huge stone, that had once probably stood upright, but that now lay half buried in the soil and broken into

three pieces. Although to one or two favoured persons the place had become known as Titania's Bower, yet its ancient traditional name was Bedgebury Ring.

#### CHAPTER III. THE TALISMAN.

BESIDES Lady Gilchurch's formal invitation, Titania had received a scrawl from Osmond promising to drive over and fetch her on the day fixed. Since the invitation came, Bensadi had departed for London, taking with him Mr. Herondale and Mustafa. The ostensible object of the visit was to consult a famous physician as to Mr. Herondale's health, which had seemed of late to be failing. But before he left Bensadi had told her that her father wished her to provide herself with every requisite for her visit, for, no doubt, she would require smart dresses and other paraphernalia, and had signed a handsome cheque for that purpose. And Titania, nothing loth, had given her orders right and left, and had not spared for anything. But on the eve of her departure she felt a strong desire to pay a last visit to her favourite haunt in the forest, which, under the stress of her preparations, she had of late neglected.

No doubt there were young gipsy scouts lying perdu in the bushes, for Titania had not gone far when she met Sidonia, who in general estimation was the queen, or anyhow the princess royal, of gipsydom. And her accomplishments were worthy of her high lineage. She sang with a charming voice the choicest music-hall ballads, and danced—ah, to see her dance, advancing and retiring with alluring eyes—would make reverend seigneurs long to set to her.

There was a strong friendship between the two young women, who had known each other from infancy, and it had been confirmed by mutual good offices.

"You need not tell the gipsy, dear little lady, that you are going away; she read it in the stars. There are lords and marquises waiting for you, darling lady, but you will be true to your own dear love."

"Oh, I don't want any of your dukerins," said Titania, laughing, "but all the same you shall not prophesy for nothing. I am rich just now with my purse full of gold pieces, and here is one for you, Sidonia; that will never be missed."

"Keep your gold, darling little lady," said Sidonia, thrusting back the proffered gift. "You shall give me a lucky six-

pence as a keepsake, and I will give you, ah, something more precious than all the gold in the world."

So saying, she produced from her bosom a little object enclosed in a wash-leather bag, which proved to be an oval piece of some translucent stone, with a neat hole drilled at one end so that it could be hung by a string round the neck. The stone was covered with curious incised figures, but was otherwise of no intrinsic value.

"There is a charm in this, dear lady, that will carry you through all the troubles that are in store for you. I can see a voyage across the water, and things that are now hid shall be revealed."

Again Titania laughingly cut short the gipsy girl's predictions, and bade her tell how she could vouch for the virtues of her talisman.

"It is yours now, dear lady, as it should be, and as it was meant to be from the beginning, as I will show you, darling lady, if you will sit down with me on this stone."

Sidonia's story went back to her childhood, when she would meet in the forest the tall and grizzled form of Sir Thomas Herondale. He, too, was addicted to haunting Bedgebury Ring, and would sit on this very stone musing for hours, especially of late years, when his strength began to fail. There was a hole in the centre of Bedgebury Stone, and Sidonia, watching him unseen from the bushes, saw him one day unloose some little object carefully from a gold chain he wore round his neck, and drop it into this hole. Sidonia pointed out how small was the hole that one could hardly get two fingers in. But Sidonia was gifted with a hand marvellously small and flexible, and an arm which at that time, Sidonia said, looking with complacency at her present well-rounded limb, "was no bigger than a stick." And as soon as the old gentleman had gone she contrived to squeeze her hand into the orifice and to push it down till she reached her prize. It cost her all the skin of her knuckles to draw out her hand again with the charm, which she had kept ever since. And she was sure it would prove a powerful charm for Titania, preserving her from shipwreck and the designs of an evil man.

The evil man was of course Bensadi. Titania accepted the gift with pleasure, pleased to think that it was a kind of family amulet. But as for Bensadi, she thought that Sidonia was too hard upon

him. He was always kind to her, although, doubtless, not friendly to gipsies.

"He is kind only to betray," said Sidonia, and in proof of what she said she would call a witness. A shrill whistle brought upon the scene a young man. Titania knew him well enough as Sidonia's sweetheart, otherwise a gipsy dealer in New Forest ponies, who was known about there as Chitsey Spot.

"Now you shall hear," said Sidonia. "Chitsey," she cried, addressing her lover, who had remained bashfully in the background, "approach and tell the little lady what you saw in London!"

Thus adjured, Mr. Spot explained that business connected with the buying or selling of ponies had taken him to St. Martin's Lane on the day but one before, and that hanging about near the church he saw a cab in the distance containing two persons whom he recognised as Bensadi and Mr. Herondale. Sharing Sidonia's dislike to Bensadi, he had had the curiosity to follow the cab, not far, but to a well-known banking-house, where the cab stopped and Bensadi alighted and entered the bank. Soon after came out a clerk, bareheaded, with a book, and went to the cab and spoke to Mr. Herondale, who was inside, and who took a pen which the clerk gave him and signed his name in the book. And after that came two gentlemen in mulberry-coloured coats with gold buttons, who bore between them sundry canvas bags which seemed of great weight, for the cab trembled as they were put in, and when Bensadi came out and rejoined his friend, and the cab drove away, it rolled along as heavily as a steam-roller! And so slowly that Mr. Spot kept up with it with ease. And luckily the man who drove recognised Chitsey as a congenial spirit and offered him a seat on the box, and the time passed in learned talk about horse-flesh till the City was reached and passed, and the cab stopped in a darksome kind of lane, where somebody was on the look-out for it, for a door opened at once and two dark Jewish-looking men came out, and shouldered the canvas bags and carried them in and shut the door. But the door had been long enough open to give Mr. Spot a glimpse of the river right through, with cranes and ropes and blocks hanging about, and the black bulk of a long, low steamer with two black funnels, each of which had painted on it in white something in the shape of a young moon. And then the cab was

ordered to drive to a big City hotel, and Chitsey left it there, having business of his own to look after.

Titania listened attentively, and thanked Mr. Spot for telling her all this. But it did not make much impression upon her. She knew that Bensadi often had things from abroad, and it seemed natural enough that he should send money to pay for them. Sidonia, with more experience of the world, thought that with all his opportunities and the virtual control of all Mr. Herondale's actions, nothing was more likely than that he would strip him of everything, and then, as Chitsey expressed it, "sling his hook."

When Titania reached home she was told that her father and Bensadi had just arrived from London, and that the latter had been asking for her, and wanted to see her at once. She found him in the garden, where he was walking to and fro with solemn, leisurely tread, his gaze riveted on the starry heavens.

"My child," he said in a musical, thrilling voice, "I have been occupying myself with your future destiny, as to which I have had of late sundry misgivings. Your youth, thanks to my watchful care, has been passed in that freedom and healthful action that is the best preparation for a great part in life. For that part you were designed from your infancy. Hitherto it has been kept from your knowledge, lest your unaccustomed eyes should be dazzled by its brilliance. But now, at your father's request, and with his sanction and paternal blessing, I am permitted to reveal it to you. Titania, you are destined to be the sharer of my future, the companion of my labours, the honoured partner of a descendant of the Caliphs."

"But that is impossible," said Titania, heedlessly interrupting the flow of Bensadi's discourse, so astonished and, indeed, horrified was she at the proposal that he had made with so much solemnity.

Bensadi's eyes sparkled with fire, his nostrils quivered, his whole face was illumined with the force of his anger, from which Titania involuntarily shrank back in alarm.

"Foolish girl," he cried in a tone of bitter contempt and anger. "Can you stay the stars in their courses with your weak, frivolous will?"

"Oh, I thought I was destined for a great part in life," cried Titania defiantly, now recovering her courage.

"A young woman," said Bensadi, "is

but clay in the hands of the potter. But I have said enough. Let the thought of your destiny sink into your heart, and extinguish any foolish youthful flames that may have kindled there, as the lightning flash extinguishes the ignis fatuus."

Bensadi disappeared within the little kiosk, not having even given Titania his customary benediction of "Peace be with you." Decidedly he was angry, yet there was something respectable in his anger. It was quite impossible that he should be the sordid adventurer such as Sidonia in her dislike would paint him.

Before she slept that night Titania placed her amulet upon a silken cord and fastened it round her neck. The moonlight gleaming on the translucent stone seemed to invest it with a strange, unnatural lustre—as if Ashtoreth recognised her own, and the dusky jewel acknowledged her illustrious sway. And Titania's sleep was chequered by strange dreams full of splendid pageantry, and yet with a chord of mystery and fear running all through.

#### CHAPTER IV. MY LADY'S GARDEN-PARTY.

OSMOND made his appearance at the appointed time to drive Titania and her belongings to Ambrehurst. Cobweb accompanied her, and the smallest of the dogs. Bensadi stood at the gate and waved benevolent adieux.

"When you shall come back you shall change your mind," he said quietly enough, but with a sinister meaning that sent a cold thrill through Titania's veins.

But then she had made up her mind not to go back very soon. The week at Ambrehurst finished, she had arranged for a cruise in her little ten-ton yacht, the "Gem." Thomas, who ruled over the stables, was also commander of the yacht, and had entered joyfully into the project. He was coachman and groom only of necessity, for he had come of a family of fishermen, and could handle a boat almost before he could walk.

Lady Gilchurch received Titania with the same strange mixture of affection and aversion that had before puzzled Titania. Yet in every way she was treated as a favoured guest, and Cobweb was in especial favour with her ladyship, who delighted to exchange badinage with her in her native tongue, and to listen to her tinkling melodies and pathetic sing-song.

The week passed pleasantly along. Titania and Osmond were happy enough,

fishing the streams and riding and driving here and there. And Captain Rohan and his friend Horace Wimpole, the assistant-surgeon, came to a dinner-party. But Lady Gilchurch herself engrossed Captain Rohan, and Wimpole chiefly fell to the share of Titania. But he was a nice youth, she thought, and gave her news of her old friend and governess, Miss Dexter. Actually, she had married Dr. Wimpole, a widower, Horace Wimpole's father; and the pair had taken a house for the season at Lee-on-the-Solent. Horace and the stepmother were not on very good terms, it seemed, and Titania proposed to herself a mission of reconciliation. Her cruise with the "Gem" should be in the Solent, and Wimpole might pay a visit to his parents at the same time. Horace was delighted, and might he bring Rohan too? Titania graciously assented.

And then Lady Gilchurch gave a garden-party which drew the whole county to Ambrehurst. Curiosity brought the chief people to the place, as the house had long been shut up, and Lord and Lady Gilchurch were almost unknown. The general verdict was that the Countess was very beautiful, but a great deal too languid and insouciant in receiving people. Captain Rohan arrived among the earliest guests, and persuaded Titania to show him over the grounds, where they lost themselves in bosky thickets and among groves of rhododendrons, and spent a delightful half-hour.

"Somehow," said Titania, half to herself, "everything seems to have gone right with me since I got my talisman." Rohan was amused that anybody should indulge in such foolish superstitions. But Titania said they were not foolish if they gave her confidence and courage, and she had noticed about the stone that it changed its temperature very suddenly and strangely, and that when certain persons approached it grew quite cold. During the last few moments she had noticed this sudden chill.

"It is in the air," said Rohan, with a slight shiver. But next moment they saw approaching along the shaded path the figure of Bensadi.

"People are looking for you everywhere," he said rather sharply to Titania, "Lady Gilchurch wants you especially. She is waiting for you on the terrace."

Titania, in some confusion, ran off towards the terrace. Rohan would have followed, but Bensadi detained him by a gesture.

There was something in the bearing and glance of Bensadi that inspired respect if not confidence; and when he gravely called Rohan to account for his attentions to Titania, in the tone of one responsible for her welfare, the young man felt himself compelled to give a full explanation. If there was anything clandestine in their intercourse, it was because his open advances had been received with something like contumely. "There is a reason for that," said Bensadi, and he went on to state that legally the stain of illegitimacy attached to her birth, and that she would not inherit a penny of her father's large fortune unless he could be brought into a condition of mind to make a will in her favour. Such was the object Bensadi had in view, and he implored Captain Rohan to leave Titania to those who had the chief interest in her welfare. Captain Rohan replied with equal frankness that such considerations could not weigh much where affections were mutually engaged, as he had reason to hope in the present case. Bensadi's face grew dark, his hand instinctively sought his side, as if expecting to find a dagger there.

"Enough," he cried; "I have spoken. Keep out of my path lest harm should befall you."

And muttering some Arabic sentences, which from their tone were hardly blessings, he turned on his heel and departed.

The guests were now departing in a flock, and Rohan had no excuse for remaining. But he contrived to have some last words with Titania.

When and where could they meet again? "Oh, somewhere in the Solent, perhaps," said Titania airily. She had promised herself a week's cruise in the "Gem," and after that she was engaged to Lady Gilchurch and Osmond for a caravan tour from the New Forest to one of Lord Gilchurch's residences near Guildford. As the cruise would include a visit to Mrs. Wimpole, at Lee-on-the-Solent, it was quite possible that he might hear news of her through his friend Horace.

#### CHAPTER V. OFF THE "NEEDLES" ROCKS.

CHRISTCHURCH was in sight, where the "Gem" lay at her moorings, mirrored in the placid tide. Thomas had engaged a nephew of his, a fisherman and experienced seaman, to help in navigating the craft, and there was a boy, Jack, engaged as cook, who had a genius for



frying fish, but whose knowledge of other departments of cookery was merely rudimentary. But Cobweb had a marvellous knack in curries and pilafs, and eccentric dishes in which her mistress took delight.

There was no time to lose if the tide was to serve, and before long the little craft was dropping down towards the harbour mouth, a narrow channel between two sand-banks, where the tide was now running out like a mill-race. A little fishing village stands on one of the sand-banks, the whole population of which had turned out to witness the departure of William, and little Jem, and Uncle Tom, on their deep-sea voyage. The seamen felt that the eye of their native village was upon them, and exerted themselves to the utmost to take their craft out smartly—awkward as the channel is, with touch and go in the bay outside, where, if the "Gem" had not had enough way on her to wear round on her heel, as it were, she must have gone ashore and stuck there till next tide. Happily, the "Gem" proved herself such and of the first water as she bravely came round, and catching the breeze that was creeping along the shore, shot forward into the deep water beyond the bar. Hengestbury Head loomed above them with its crown of shaggy heath, and the green slopes of its vast entrenchments, and beyond, the coast line stretched in a wide sweep of cliff and serried headlands. But wherever there was a dip or break in the rigid coast line, some pleasure settlement had been planted there. There was Southbourne with its pier, and Boscombe and Bournemouth beyond, and a steamer could be seen making its way from Swanage.

As the wind had fallen light, and the tide was running strongly out, the men let go the anchor close inshore to wait for the first of the flood. It was a real midsummer sea, almost calm, but covered with little rippling waves that made gentle music as they broke in phosphorescent sparkles against the vessel's side. The setting sun sent its ruddy beams into the deep curve of Alum Bay, and lighted up the coloured sands of its huge cliffs till they shone with iridescent glow. And presently the moon rose majestic over the desolate shore, and touched everything with a pale primrose light. It was an evening of enchantment. The seamen felt the charm of it as their rugged faces were lit up by the glow. And Jack the mousse, who was slicing kidney

beans for the evening meal as he sat on the bowsprit heel, seemed quite entranced in the glamour of the scene. Cobweb, too, had brought on deck a small Moorish zither, and now began a little wild and plaintive melody with a tinkling accompaniment that somehow seemed to harmonise with all the surroundings.

As Cobweb finished her song, and silence once more settled on the placid waters, the strain was taken up close at hand, as, rounding the point, a long, low steamer with two funnels stole almost noiselessly along. The song ceased next moment as if in compliance with a gruff order from some one on board; but Cobweb had heard the strain, and, springing up excitedly, she cried:

"Dat my countryman, missie, sing dat!"

Thomas, watching the strange steamer's progress, hailed her in somewhat contemptuous accents:

"You'll be running athwart the Cockleshoe if you don't keep out a bit!"

Somebody peered down at them from the steamer's deck as her engines slowed—a swarthy face, surmounted by a gold band.

"Tank you, tank you! Are you a pilot, sar?"

Rejoined Thomas: "No; but I can put you through this here passage as well as e'er a one of them."

Said the voice: "All right, my friend. Then will you come aboard?"

Thomas turned to his mistress.

"What do you say, Miss Tansie, if I pilot 'em through the channel and they gives us a tow? 'Twill save a vast o' time, you know, miss."

Titania assented, and Thomas hailed the steamer to heave a rope on board. This was done, and the "Gem" hauled alongside the steamer—which had no name painted on her, but bore the emblem of the crescent on her funnels—when Thomas climbed on board, and at the same time one of the steamer's crew descended with a hawser "to help heave anchor," as he said. The man was a strong, swarthy negro, and saluted those on board with a display of white ivories as he stepped forward to haul in the anchor chain and secure the towing hawser—all very smartly and readily done. In less time than it takes to tell it the boat was swiftly gliding along in the track of the steamer, which now, under Thomas's pilotage, stood out from the shore.

The respect and confidence inspired by Thomas's position and experience for some time silenced any criticism upon the course he took, or anyhow that the yacht took presumably under his direction; but when the steamer, instead of heading for the channel between the island and the mainland, took a sweep in the contrary direction as if for the open sea, it seemed to those left on board the "Gem" that something had gone wrong. They were leaving behind them the lights from shore and headland, and the cheerful gleam from the settlements scattered along the coast, and actually they were about to round the dark mass of the Needles rocks, the shadows of which were cast in inky blackness over the waves, and before them gleamed the open sea, with a shadowy sail here and there showing in the hazy moonlight.

"Thomas ahoy!" shouted William from the deck of the "Gem." "Where away, my lad?"

There was no response from Thomas, but a voice from the taffrail cried:

"We shall take you a nice leetle voyage round the island, my friends."

"But I don't want to go round the island!" cried Titania, feeling a vague alarm. "Tell him to stop and put our man on board again." But there was no reply to William's repeated hails. "Then cast off the tow-rope!" cried Titania. And William left the tiller in her hands while he ran forward to cast off.

"No, you don't touch dat!" snarled the black man in the bows; and as William still advanced, a knife gleamed in the air, and he recoiled from its offered point.

"Hanged if this ain't kidnapping, miss!" cried William, as he stood facing the black ready for a spring, and yet seeing no chance of evading the gleaming knife of his opponent.

Titania saw the danger in which her retainer stood, and how this powerful negro had them at his mercy.

"Cobweb," cried Titania, "quick! Crawl into the cabin and bring the revolver that hangs under the lamp!"

Cobweb performed her errand with silent swiftness; but although Titania was a good pistol-shot, the two men were too nearly in a line to permit her to fire except with the risk of shooting her own man.

"William," she said, in a low voice, "when I count ten, drop, and I will fire over your head."

William comprehended, and still keeping his face to the foe, he waited till he heard

the word ten, and then threw himself flat on the deck. But the other had comprehended too, and he ducked with the rapidity of light, and the bullet passed harmlessly overhead. But although it failed of its destined billet, the bullet, by great good fortune, hit the quivering tow-line, severing half its strands, so that next moment the weakened rope snapped off with a loud crack; and in the recoil the length of hawser attached to the "Gem" curled round the negro's body and disabled him for the moment, and William was quick enough to rush in and disarm the man and secure him before he was able to disengage himself. Then hoisting foresail and mainsail with Jack's assistance, William was soon able to bring the "Gem" before the wind, which was now blowing a pretty stiff breeze from the south-west.

The people on board the steamer had either not noticed the parting of the hawser, or were afraid of running aground if they put about in pursuit of the boat. They slowed and stopped, sounded the steam whistle, and hoisted some kind of signal flag, the meaning of which was unknown to the crew of the "Gem." But the negro understood it, for, watching his opportunity, he dived head foremost into the sea, and was soon seen striking out vigorously for the steamer, which lowered a boat filled with a dark, savage-looking crew, with knives and pistols sticking out of their embroidered sashes. The boat picked up the negro, and then seemed inclined to give chase to the "Gem"; but the latter was now spanking along at a slashing pace towards the Solent, and pursuit would have been useless. Following the movements of the steamer with her glasses, Titania saw that the steamer had lowered another boat, and had landed a solitary figure on the nearest projecting point; and then the steamer picked up both her boats and steamed away at a pace that soon carried her out of sight.

#### CHAPTER VI. A CRUISE IN THE SOLENT.

As the tide had now turned and was setting strongly in for the strait, it was useless to think of putting back for Thomas. The rest of the crew, indeed, were disposed to chuckle over the retribution that had fallen upon him.

"Th' ole man'll have a proper smart walk for his payns," said William silyly; "he won't be playing at piloting again in a hurry."

And now they were racing through the narrow channel between the island and Hurst Castle, that showed grim and black against the moonlight at the end of its long spit of white shingle. Yet it looked snug and cosy, too, as a nearer view revealed its red-tiled roofs peeping among its white bastions and dark, grassy slopes, with lights gleaming here and there among the silent black guns, that seemed to be keeping watch and ward over the channel. Lights gleamed, too, from the forts on the other side of the channel, hardly a mile across, and a boat loaded with artillerymen who were singing merrily enough, but not too sweetly, was passing from one shore to the other.

That night the "Gem" took up moorings in the roadstead of Lymington, where a goodly number of small yachts were already assembled, making the waters bright with flitting lights as little boats shot to and fro, while the night air was enlivened with impromptu concerts, in which Cobweb's songs were especially applauded.

Right in the fairway of the estuary lies the pretty little new settlement of Lee-on-the-Solent, with shining sands and bathing machines, and a full equipment of hotels and lodging-houses.

"I wonder if anybody is looking out for me?" said Titania to herself. And then she espied a group upon the sands, of which one of the component parts was her old friend, who waved a light crimson sunshade in their direction, a salute which the "Gem" acknowledged by dipping her ensign. Then anchor was dropped and the dingy brought round.

Mrs. Wimpole received Titania with great delight. The Doctor, who was very well-preserved, but slightly crusty in demeanour, was polite, but reserved. But he warmed up a little when he found that the visitor hailed from the New Forest.

But the Doctor was inclined to draw in again when Titania, giving an account of her adventure with the steamer off the Needles, declared that she had never felt really afraid during the whole affair, for she was in possession of an amulet that would save her from any serious harm.

"Amulet! rubbish!" cried the Doctor, in scornful accents.

But his wife was more credulous.

"Do show it me, dear," she whispered to Titania, who produced from her bosom the little oval of carved soapstone. The Doctor examined it as well as his wife,

and treated it with more respect in the end. He brought out a magnifying glass, turned it here and there, and scrutinised it minutely.

"My dear," he said, looking up from the task, "this is undoubtedly curious. Here are ancient uncial characters, probably Phœnician, very minute, but of archaic character; and on the other side a quite modern inscription in Arabic, which I can read and translate."

Dr. Wimpole polished his magnifying glass, and also his gold-rimmed spectacles, and with pen and ink began carefully to transcribe from the minute inscription on the amulet. "This," he said at last, "is to the effect that in the year 1269 of the Hegira in the month Rajab, Omar, descendant of the true Caliphs, deposited the treasure which Allah had bestowed upon him in the shrine of the holy imaum."

Titania professed her gratitude to the Doctor for the light he had thrown upon her amulet, but she was firm to regain possession of it, rejecting all the Doctor's suggestions of sending it to the British Museum for the deciphering of the Phœnician inscription. She could not feel happy while the talisman was out of her keeping, and its possession infused in her a sense of strength and security, that if it were the product of imagination, went to show the value of that faculty.

And further thought of the matter was driven out of her head by the appearance of Captain Rohan, who had induced Horace Wimpole to bring him to be introduced to his, Wimpole's, stepmother. And Mrs. Wimpole was really anxious to conciliate her husband's family, and vastly pleased to find that Horace was ready to show the olive-branch.

"It is the talisman," she whispered to Titania, as the party sat down to luncheon by the open window, with the pleasant waters of the Solent stretched before them, studded with white sails. There was a general assent when Titania proposed a cruise in the "Gem," and to visit the big ships and forts at Spithead. All were ready to go except the Doctor, who had writing to do—and probably a nap—in his study.

There was a pleasant, north-westerly breeze, which served them either way, and a tender, hazy light, in which the white wings of the yachts came softly into view, with some green jutting promontory, or now and then the dark hull of a great war-ship. The huge white forts loomed out of

the sea haze, with now and then a curl of white smoke from a ship at gun-practice, while the deep-toned thunder followed, softened by distance.

They dined on board on chicken and rice, prepared by Cobweb's skilful hands, as the sun was going down into the sea red and glorious. And then they went about and made for Cowes harbour, which opened upon them bright and charming with crimson reflections from the clouds above, and the green and gold of the incoming tide; while from sea and shore thousands of twinkling lights sparkled and were reflected in the placid waters, mirror-like except where ruffled by the oars of passing boats, that left behind a line of golden ripples. Something in the way of a regatta had been going on, and as darkness came on all the club-houses and hotels shone forth in lines of brilliant illumination; the yachts were decked with Chinese lanterns and lights of all kinds, and the broad estuary presented a scene of fairy-like and dazzling beauty.

When the boat was put about for the opposite shore, and passed out of the brilliance of Cowes into the calm tranquillity of the Solent, the moon was just rising redly among the mists of Spithead, and wandering lights of red and green swept to and fro. Now a great ocean steamship with long lines of lighted ports came hooting out of the hazy distance, or a panting tug, or a great schooner yacht came rustling past like a bird of prey, and the little "Gem" danced in its wake, becalmed by the mighty spread of its canvas.

But silence had fallen over the whole party. Mrs. Wimpole was genuinely asleep in a corner. Horace was thoughtfully smoking forward, feeling rather out of humour with himself and his friends. His stepmother, more experienced than he in affairs of the heart, had given him a hint that it was of no use his thinking about Titania. And he had thought a good deal about her lately, and she had seemed to like him; and now he saw himself at a stroke deprived of the illusions of love and friendship.

"Would I have brought Rohan along here had I known?" he said to himself savagely.

Titania had taken a turn at the helm, and was sitting with the tiller in her hand watching the sail, and keeping an eye on William, who was on the look-out forward. Rohan sat near, and followed every movement of hers with admiring eyes.

"Titania," he began after a long silence, "I have really something very particular to say to you when you are able to listen to me."

"Forbidden to talk to the girl at the wheel," she replied with sober meaning, and Rohan sank back in savage silence, gnawing the ends of his moustache as he watched the glittering path that the boat was cutting through the water.

But Titania presently called to Jem to take her place, and edged up to Rohan, who still kept his gaze fixed upon distant objects.

"Well, I shall be cross too," said Titania, also beginning to study the distant horizon. "Only are we not wasting time a little if you really have anything to say?"

Their eyes met, and they both laughed.

"Yes, I was foolish," said Rohan. "But I have been longing for a serious talk all day, and when you snubbed me just now— But, Titania, a crisis has come. I have to leave Christchurch. I have received a staff appointment at Gibraltar that I have been hoping for a long while, and now it is mine—there, I shall throw it up unless you will go with me, Titania."

"But that is terribly sudden," cried Titania, not knowing exactly what to say.

"It is sudden," rejoined Rohan, "but I can't bear the thought of leaving you. Oh, Titania, if you could only make up your mind to be a soldier's wife!"

"Is there anything so very terrible in that?" said Titania, with a glance in which there was so much tenderness, as well as archness, that Rohan hesitated no longer.

"My darling," he cried, clasping her round the waist. "And I have been so afraid of you, my little fairy."

"But you mustn't be rash," said Titania, not caring, however, to disengage herself from Rohan's encircling arms. "You don't know all about me yet."

"I'll jump the rest," said Rohan, kissing her rosy lips.

But as time was short and immediate arrangements necessary, Rohan could see only one way out of the perplexity—that Titania should marry him at once, and give him the right to act for her, when he could call Bensadi to account, and provide securely for her father's future comfort. And as really that was the best plan, Titania was not difficult to persuade into consent. But then the practical question arose: Could they marry without her



father's consent, Titania being under age—such consent being evidently a thing unattainable? Yes, a marriage by banns was possible—any other course involved perjury at one or other of its stages. But by putting up banns in the respective parishes of Christchurch and Bolder Hatch, the wedding might be celebrated in the secluded church of the latter.

Next day Captain Rohan and Wimpole were obliged to return to their quarters, and the rest of the week's cruising lacked a little of the charm of expectation. But there were Rohan's letters to look forward to, and replies to cogitate over. And then came another scrawl from Osmond to say that all was ready for a start, and that Titania must meet the van at the cross-roads just outside Romsey town.

#### CHAPTER VII. A CARAVAN TOUR; WITH MILITARY MANŒUVRES.

AT the cross-roads just out of Romsey town on the Forest side two caravans were drawn up, both as smart as paint and gilding could make them. A small group of country children were admiringly gathered, half in hopes that the vehicles were the precursors of some circus or wild-beast show. "That ain't no show," cried an older and more experienced rustic. "That's 'lectioneering business, that is." And people seemed disappointed that there was no distribution of leaflets and political addresses, and no attempt to get up a meeting on the village green. Osmond was looking very business-like in velvetens, with a yellow bandanna twisted round his neck, and a hareskin cap, a parting gift from Mr. Spot, on his closely-cropped locks. He received Titania with enthusiasm, and dragged her away to inspect all the arrangements. There was the sleeping van, with its berths and all toilette requisites, which she was to share with Lady Gilchurch; and the kitchen van, which was charged with all the materials for a prolonged picnic, and with a neat batterie de cuisine, presided over by François, a French cook from one of Lord Gilchurch's houses.

Osmond was eager for a start, and to show his skill in putting to the horses, which were grazing by the side of the road. But Lady Gilchurch and Titania preferred to follow the cavalcade at a little distance through the town, as if they did not belong to it, not being yet quite inured to the position. It was a pretty

scene as the glittering vans crossed the bridge over the brimming little river Test, with the low but massive tower of the Abbey church showing over the roofs of the quiet little town; and the church with its fine Norman nave must be visited by Titania, and formed a cool and pleasant resting-place in the heat of the day. Beyond the town towards Hursley Osmond had found a pleasant camping ground under the shade of some fine beeches. And here they lunched and lounged till the heat of the day was spent; and then they made a long trek to the other side of Hursley, a pretty, quiet, solemn little village, with a fine church, under the invocation of Keble of the "Christian Year."

The first night passed pleasantly enough. The party had encamped on a breezy common half-way between Hursley and Winchester, a place that Sidonia had recommended for its sweet air and plentiful water supply. The night was fine and the stars shone gloriously, and now and then a shooting star glanced like a kindling arrow across the firmament. The heathy, sandy common was uninfested by flies or gnats, and the soft breeze of the night as it gently stirred the curtains of the sleeping chamber, diffused a balmy perfume of heather and wild herbs. A donkey and a cow or two formed the acquaintance of the animals of the cavalcade. Rollo, Titania's big dog, slept under the van, and Osmond in a hammock slung across a light tent; and except for the quacking and splashing of ducks in a neighbouring pond, as twilight deepened into night, a perfect stillness fell upon the scene.

But in spite of the peaceful nature of her surroundings, Lady Gilchurch's sleep was troubled and disturbed. Titania heard her calling out in some strange language; it seemed as if she imagined herself in some terrible danger with which she could not cope. But her final words were clear and decisive enough. "Let her perish," she cried, "if I can save my boy." Titania heard no more after that, for she fell into a profound sleep, and the sun was shining in at the windows of the van when next she opened her eyes.

They were on trek at an early hour, in order to get through Winchester and reach their camping ground beyond before the heat of the day had become excessive. Soon among the meadows they found St. Cross, with its old-world church and cloisters, and its bedesmen, who loitered

about the gate to watch the vans pass by. Osmond was delighted that he was taken for a gipsy wayfarer, and served with a manchet of bread and a draught of ale at the buttery hatch.

The vans went on up the gay little High Street of Winchester, with its market cross and quaint piazza, and the broad shaded walk that leads under the houses towards the cathedral, and that winds among the old gravestones and under the grey buttresses to where St. Swithin was buried out in the rain and the sunshine. And coming from the New Forest, who could fail to look for the tomb of the Red King, whose corpse upon old Parkiss's cart must have followed the same route as the gipsy vans? And who that was a disciple of the gentle craft could have passed the tomb of good old Isaac Walton without a visit, or what lover of good literature would see unmoved the resting-place of the inimitable Jane Austen?

But when they were clear of Winchester it came on to rain a little, and thunder muttered in the distance. Yet the weather cleared again presently, and everything smelt so fresh and balmy that the rain was voted to be a blessing in disguise. And here they forsook the main road and took a by-way which led to a famous Beacon Hill, where there was a grand view over the New Forest, and with a glass Titania could make out the Bolder woods, and thought she caught the gleam of the gilded minaret of Bolder Hatch. The Solent, too, was stretched in full view, with all its fleets of war and pleasure, and the Isle of Wight in its lovely verdure; while on the other hand there lay the wooded varied plain of Andred's Weold stretching into and through the heart of Sussex. And between West Meon and Petersfield they found another pleasant common, where things were made snug for the night. And pleased with the neighbourhood—that is, Titania and Osmond, for as for Lady Gilchurch she only cared for landscapes that pleased her son—they established a kind of permanent camp and had many pleasant rambles; some into Gilbert White's country, among the hanging woods and romantic ravines, which came as a delightful surprise after the wild and woldy downs. And from here they moved on into Woolmer Forest, where now no forest is, but still with wild, pleasant scenery, heaths, and open spaces suitable for encampments.

On rising ground near Woolmer Pond,

which recalls some Highland loch among the moorlands, the vans came to a halt. There was a spring close by, the wanderers had been told, and Titania and Osmond went to look for it. Turning the corner of a copse they came suddenly upon a cavalry vedette, which had come to a halt there. Horses were tethered here and there, arms piled, and the blue smoke of a fire rose against the dark background of pines.

They were looking out for the enemy, said the young officer in command.

"You don't happen to have seen anything of them?" It seemed that the vans must have passed through the enemy's country, but without having met with any troops. "There will be a battle round here to-morrow," said the young fellow, "about ten thousand men on each side, so you are in the luck of it."

Then a signaller came riding down from the top of the hill, where he had been waving his flag to some one on the top of another hill, and the orders were to close in. And the resting men sprang to their feet, and horses' bridles were adjusted, and girths were tightened, and the whole troop vanished behind the wood.

However, the news of the approaching battle made the wayfarers wish to push on so as, at all events, to reach the outskirts of the fight. And after dinner the vans were driven on for three or four miles, and halted on a common with a great highway running through it. But the night was not passed without sundry alarms. The enemy's outposts were already placed in the immediate neighbourhood, and pickets every now and then marched past, exciting the anger of the dogs who were tied up underneath the vans. And occasionally a stray group or two, taking the vans for regular traders, would rattle at the door with the whispered enquiry:

"Mother! haven't you got a drop o' whisky handy?"

Titania was up betimes and inhaling the delicious morning fragrance of the heather, and calling Osmond, the pair made for an elevation where they could get a glimpse of the country round about. Hindhead was the chief summit in view, looking noble with his dark crest wreathed with the morning's mist, and hills beyond hills stretched away to the horizon. Turning the other way, to where the white road wound through heath and common, they saw a cloud of dust arise in the distance and heard a kind of thunderous

rumble, that, as the dust-cloud came nearer and nearer, resolved itself into the thud of horses' hoofs and the heavy roll of a field battery going at full speed. Turning at the foot of the hill, the whole battery left the road and dashed across the common, the guns bounding and leaping over the uneven ground, the captain galloping in front, who, as he reached the crest of the hill, raised his hand, and reining up his horse on its haunches, the whole cavalcade came to a halt behind him. Guns were unlimbered, ammunition served out, and everything ready for action on the instant. And then, with a gruff roar, the first guns of the battle spoke forth, directed upon the rough copse of underwood beneath, without apparent purpose.

But next moment a number of puffs of smoke broke forth from the edges of the copse, and the crackle of rifle fire spurted along here and there, and, as if a train of combustibles had taken fire, from hedge-rows, ditches, and gorse bushes in front of the wood blazed forth flashes of light, and their curls of smoke rose all around. Then the guns went at it all the harder, with a noise as if somebody were beating an enormous drum.

Titania, sheltered behind a huge furze bush, held her fingers to her ears, and begged Osmond to go and stop that noise, who only laughed and asked her if she thought that battles were put off to please girls. But presently a bugle sounded from the copse below, which said as plainly as possible, retire; and the sputtering fire died away, and with a parting salvo the artillery fire ceased.

"Victory for us," cried Osmond.

"Why, there are the enemy," said Titania, unsealing her ears.

Next moment a staff officer dashed up the hill—one of the umpires, it seemed.

"Captain Rohan, you are ruled out of action."

"I say, how's that?" cried Rohan in an indignant tone. "I stopped those fellows beautifully."

"So you did, old chap," said the other soothingly, "but your general has pushed on too far without adequate support, and you are out of it for twenty-four hours. Wish I was."

When men get their blood up, even in a sham fight, they don't like to be beaten, and the battery was limbered up for departure with far less dash than had been shown before. But most people would

have thought that Rohan was in wonderful luck, seeing that his sweetheart was at hand to mitigate his hard fate. And breakfast was ready for the prisoner and his captors when they returned to the woods—cutlets and omelettes, prepared by the chef, and fruit from Ambrehurst, delicious in colour and fragrance. François improvised coffee for the whole battery, and in the enthusiasm of the moment compiled a solid but ornamental dish, of which the chief ingredients were beefsteak and fried potatoes, which he dedicated in his own words "A l'Armée Anglaise," and which was speedily, so to say, "out of print" from the kindly way in which it was received.

And Rohan sent his battery to the rear in charge of his subaltern while he performed the duties of cicerone to Lady Gilchurch and Titania, getting them to the best point of view and explaining the tactics of the day as far as he, or anybody else, understood them. Thin lines of smoke creeping here and there, masses of white smoke belching forth from clumps of wood, the occasional glitter of a cavalry charge, with the crackling of musketry and the thunder of ordnance, made up the scene of the battle, of which the defending force seemed to get the best, their fire rolling on with increased volume, while the other subsided into spurts and patches. And then the "bugles sang truce," and stillness came over the scene; the groups of rustics who had gathered here and there dispersed, and there was a general quick march for camp and quarters.

Rohan had found opportunity for a few private words with Titania. Everything had gone on well. The banns had been put up for two Sundays without exciting attention, as far as could be judged, and on the second day of the following week they would be joined together in holy matrimony. The wedding would be in Bolder Church. Wimpole would be there as best man. Would it do to let the Countess into the secret? She was so kind, and it would be better for Titania to have a woman to confide in. But Titania felt the talisman that hung on her bosom turn cold—that had occurred more than once before, and generally when Bonsadi or Lady Gilchurch was near at hand. And now the Countess was coming towards them with a smile on her lips, and she put her arm caressingly over Titania's shoulder.

"The evening air is chilly, little one,"

she said. "It is time we retired to our nests. Peace be with you!"

#### CHAPTER VIII. A PLOT AND ITS VICTIM.

THE caravan journey was coming to an end. They had camped one night near Frensham Pond, surrounded by a strange, wild country, of which the Devil's Jumps, a row of curious protuberances in the surrounding waste, formed a chief and sinister feature. No quantity of villa residences and Elizabethan lodges sprinkled here and there, can overcome the inherent wildness and savagery of scene, and as the shades of evening arise—it is customary but inaccurate to say they descend—and Hindhead stands out against the murky glow of the evening sky with its "murder cross" showing like a finger pointing upwards from the encrimsoned summit, the eerie solemnity of the sight is hardly to be surpassed.

It was here, as night drew on and the features of the scene were becoming blurred and indistinct, that a carriage drew up, the coachman's check-string being violently pulled as some one within perceived signs of the distant encampment. An attendant jumped down and ran to the carriage window. It was Thomas, who had covered his seaman's rig with the long great-coat of the serving man.

"There they are," said Bensadi, pointing out the lights of the encampment. "Contrive to see Lady Gilchurch without alarming your young mistress, and ask her to break the news. Give her this note, which will explain."

Thomas touched his hat, and with a grave face made off across the heath. The carriage then, slowly and by a circuitous route, began to approach the encampment. When it stopped within a hundred yards of the place a female figure left the tents and hastily approached. It was Lady Gilchurch, and Bensadi alighting, held open the carriage door.

"Enter!" he said. "We can converse at our leisure."

Lady Gilchurch obeyed.

"Is Mr. Herondale then so ill?" she asked indifferently.

"He will die," replied Bensadi. "In Mustafa's absence he found the flask which contained the fluid of life, drank too eagerly—he will never regain consciousness."

Lady Gilchurch sighed as if some great load were taken from her bosom.

"Ah! You think that is safety for you; but it is danger for me. They will say I poisoned him. Happily I am prepared. All that belonged to him—or to me rather—the product of his uncle's theft, is safely shipped to our native land. I have the clue to the rest of the treasure. My tribesmen are eagerly awaiting my arrival, and a steamer, the fastest on the seas, is awaiting me in the Solent. But I shall not go alone. The girl who is of the blood of Omar is not to be left to be the prey of Christian dogs!"

"But you will not persuade her to go," said Lady Gilchurch. "She has promised to marry Rohan. They have planned to escape from your control."

"Ah, they have planned!" cried Bensadi contemptuously. "But time presses, and she must leave with me this very night."

"That is impossible!" said Lady Gilchurch firmly. "You must give me time to remove her scruples. You would not use force. At a cry of distress a hundred armed men would spring from the ground."

"Nothing is simpler," said Bensadi calmly. "Here in this silver flask is a cordial which you shall persuade her to drink to fortify her against the fatigues of travelling. Forthwith she will be plunged into a heavenly calm, in which the mental powers will be enthralled. She will follow me blindly, as a fawn follows the doe."

"It is the same drug that you have so long used upon Herondale?"

Bensadi nodded.

"The same which my forefathers have used for generations, when they admitted the faithful to a taste of the joys of Paradise. Fear not; it is only in excess that it kills."

"But I will not do it," cried Lady Gilchurch. "Shall I give up my own daughter to the will of one like you?"

"You shall," replied Bensadi. "I am in possession of your secret. I can put my hand on the proof of your marriage with Herondale. I can show that your marriage with Lord Gilchurch was a fraud, and that your idolised son, instead of being the heir to title and fortune, is but a nameless bastard."

"Stay," cried Lady Gilchurch, "you are too strong for me. What would you have me do? Why would you bring upon me this horrible expiation?"

"I would not," said Bensadi. "I would rather insure you against it. Only do this little thing for me. The girl will live to bless you for it."



Lady Gilchurch shook her head and shuddered.

"It is a crime, say what you will—a base, unnatural crime. But I am yours, Bensadi. Only show me how to save my son."

"That is easy enough," replied Bensadi. "Obey me; that is sufficient. No living soul but I or Herondale could prove your identity with the woman he married. He cannot and I will not—if you obey."

"Then 'give me the flask," cried Lady Gilchurch desperately.

Half an hour after this the carriage was drawn up by the caravan camp, luggage packed on the roof, lamps lighted, and the horses pawing impatiently in their haste to be moving.

And then Titania appeared, leaning on Bensadi's arm, and looking about her with strange, wondering eyes. Lady Gilchurch followed, crushing back her remorse and assuming a look of sympathetic sorrow. Osmond was there too, looking at his late companion with undisguised concern.

"Mother," he said, "she is not fit to travel. She shall not go to-night."

"Hush!" said Lady Gilchurch impatiently; "she is only upset by her father's illness. She will be all right presently."

Just at this moment a scream was heard from the camp, and Cobweb came forth, having only just heard that her mistress was going and she to be left behind; an arrangement she indignantly repudiated.

"Stand back, daughter of Satan," cried Bensadi; but Cobweb sprang into the carriage after her mistress, whose knees she embraced.

Bensadi would have dragged her out, but Lady Gilchurch interfered.

"No, she must go," she said, and Bensadi did not further dispute the matter, but jumped into the carriage, which speedily was lost to sight in the gloom.

#### CHAPTER IX. IN THE BAY OF BISCAY.

MR. HERONDALE was dead. Captain Rohan heard the news from his servant on the very morning that was to have witnessed his wedding to Titania. He had been at Bolder Hatch the night before and had found the household in great consternation on account of its master's dangerous state. A local doctor had been called in, who had considered that the symptoms were altogether abnormal. Bensadi had gone to fetch Miss Herondale, who was away gipsying, but they ought to

have returned long ago, for Thomas, who had been charged with bringing home Rollo and Miss Herondale's miscellaneous belongings, had arrived the night before, and the others had started before him. All this had given Rohan a good deal of uneasiness. Still, the travellers might have missed a train, and Sunday travelling is embarrassed by a meagre time bill. There was only an early morning train and a late night one, and both of these Rohan met, but without hearing anything of Titania. He telegraphed to Mrs. Wimpole to come over at once so that Titania might have a friend to be with her, and, in fact, Mrs. Wimpole had arrived that very morning just in time to hear of the death of Herondale; but no Titania.

It was all very perplexing, indeed alarming, the Bensadi element being taken into consideration; and now suspicious details began to appear. Mustafa was gone, many of the valuable enamels and vases which had adorned Mr. Herondale's rooms had been removed. Communications with Mr. Herondale's London bankers revealed the fact that Mr. Herondale had withdrawn all his securities from their charge and closed his account some time since. The aspect of affairs was now so serious that the police were called in, and enquiries made at all stations on the line of route. It turned out that a foreign gentleman, a young lady, and a black servant had arrived at Portsmouth by the last train, and had taken a cab to South-sea Pier, where a boat was waiting to take them on board some vessel. There was no other clue. The coastguard men had noticed a long, low steamer with two funnels, which was lying a good way out, even beyond the Nab, and from which a boat came in the dusk with a crew of darkies. But in the morning she was gone and nothing more was known of her.

There was an inquest on Mr. Herondale's body, and an open verdict returned. The medical evidence showed that he had died of narcotic poisoning, but there was no evidence beyond that. Here, however, Lord Gilchurch came upon the scene and sought an interview with Captain Rohan. It was a painful family affair he had to reveal, but he thought he could read the riddle of Bensadi. He was obliged to own that Lady Gilchurch had once been the mistress of Herondale, the sculptor, and the mother of Titania; that he had persuaded her to go off with him, but that

he had married her before the birth of Osmond, and that therefore the title of the latter to succeed him was inextinguishable. Now Bensadi and Lady Gilchurch, if not brother and sister, anyhow were of the same race, and had been captured by the Sultan of Morocco when he defeated and took prisoner the rebel Kaid and Shereef Omar. Eventually, about thirty years ago, as we have heard, they were sold as slaves in the market at Fez and purchased for Sir Thomas Herondale, who had agents there to buy up Moorish curios. It was from the treasure of the vanquished Omar that Sir Thomas, it will be remembered, carved out his splendid fortune, which now Bensadi had succeeded in carrying back to Morocco, for thither he had gone, no doubt. Already there were rumours of disturbances there. Some of the tribes had risen, and were found to be well supplied with arms of the latest and best, and they were said to be expecting the arrival of a commander of the faith and a descendant of Omar to lead them on to victory. Putting all these things together, Lord Gilchurch thought that it was pretty plain that Bensadi was out of everybody's reach. And as for Titania, she must be held to have accompanied him willingly. She had left with Bensadi, fully knowing his designs, that was quite evident, and the course that approved itself to any rational judgement was to let the whole affair pass into complete oblivion.

But Rohan refused to believe that Titania had proved so faithless and so feeble in resolve. Yet what could he do, without any clue to guide him, or any certain proof that the girl had been carried off against her will? But in the darkness of his perplexity a gleam of light appeared. Soon after Lord Gilchurch had departed a fisherman made his appearance, who hailed from Mudeford, and who knew Miss Herondale, and even Captain Rohan by sight; and he had happened to be on Southsea Pier on business of his own, and seeing a boat lying there waiting for somebody, and manned by a lot of darkies, he kept an eye upon the craft. Well, a cab arrived, and a lady and gentleman got out, their luggage was put on board the boat, the lady standing on one side while the gentleman gave directions. And then he saw that the lady was Miss Herondale. She took no notice of anything; indeed, she seemed dazed like or as if stupefied, but on his

touching his hat to her a sudden flash of recognition seemed to come over her. She made a step towards him, and thrust something into his hand. "For Rohan," she whispered in a strangely altered voice, and with a look that gave the fisherman quite a fright; and then the gentleman took her by the hand, and she let him hand her into the boat just like a lamb. And the fisherman had made his way to Christchurch as soon as he could to find Captain Rohan and give him the object in question. It was poor Titania's talisman, hanging from the silken cord just as she had taken it from her neck. The sight of it appealed strongly to Rohan's feelings. He knew what value she attached to it, and there seemed in its transmission a mute appeal to him for help. And Titania had told him, as it happened, the way in which she became possessed of her charm, and how it had once belonged to Sir Thomas Herondale, and also of the inscription and Dr. Wimpole's translation thereof; and these things went to confirm Lord Gilchurch's strange revelations.

And assuming that Bensadi had taken refuge among his own tribesmen, where, in what direction, was he to be sought? The answer was not difficult. The revolted Kaid Omar had been the chief of a Kabyle tribe, who occupied the country on the banks of the chief river of the Atlantic seaboard, the Sebou, which is navigable as high as Fez, but which is practically closed to commerce owing to the stirring nature of the tribes among whom it passes. There is no port at the mouth of the river, but numerous creeks and lagoons would afford shelter to a steamer of light draught, that might, were the coast population as enterprising as of yore, have rivalled the exploits of the once dreaded Barbary corsairs.

Having once fixed the quarter in which researches should be made, Rohan lost no time in elaborate preparations. He was entitled to three months' leave before taking up his appointment at Gibraltar, and to an advance of three months' pay, which was equally needful. And having settled all his worldly affairs, he started at once for Southampton, intending to take the first steamer for Gibraltar, and so to Tangier by the local service. But in the docks he found a smart and fast trading steamer that was going direct to Tangier with a miscellaneous cargo. The captain was a fine, open-hearted sailor,

who seemed to know the Moors and Berbers, and the hundred and one mixed tribes in Morocco, as well as he did his own countrymen. And when he heard the purpose of Captain Rohan's voyage, he insisted on his taking a free passage, except for his share of the messing expenses. This was a fortunate beginning of a formidable undertaking, a good fortune which poor Titania would have ascribed to the working of the talisman.

Such a charm, however, may rule the planet, but it cannot rule the waves; yet the voyage at first was calm and prosperous. The pilot was dropped at St. Catherine's Point; Ushant was made out at night by its revolving light; the stormy Bay of Biscay proved unusually mild; the light from Cape Finisterre greeted the mariners, who had been a day and a night without sight of land; and without sighting Cape St. Vincent, the captain judged that he had rounded it, and was making straight for his port, when there came roaring down from the Gut of Gibraltar such a terrible gale that the steamer was forced to run before it, unable to make head against the wild seas that threatened to engulf her. The sky was overspread with a sullen kind of pallor, the sea, grey and gloomy, rose in huge frothing waves, of which the crests, driven by the roaring wind, formed a cutting drift, that bit and stung like whip-lashes. The night was still worse. The captain, ignorant of his exact position and dreading a lee shore, tried to wear the ship and heave-to, but in the trial, the engines going full speed with a high pressure of steam, one of the steam-pipes burst, and the engines were practically disabled. Then the steamer was driven before the gale, her decks swept by huge seas, swamping the engine-room and putting out the fires. It was now a question whether the ship would founder at sea, or be driven upon the African coast and broken up in the surf.

The latter fate seemed imminent, as a glimpse of moonlight showed a long, low coast at hand, bare and sandy except where scattered palm-trees, here and there, were bending before the blast. The shock of touching ground sent everybody off their feet, as the captain, for a last chance, sang out to let go the anchor. Next moment, however, the boat was free again. The anchor was let go, it held, and the steamer was brought up in comparatively

smooth water. And then, as if by magic, a complete change came over the scene. The gale went roaring off, a complete calm succeeded, and while heavy seas still showed their white crests in the moonlight out at sea, where the vessel lay was now like a placid lake. Evidently the boat had just touched the bar of some river estuary, and was now lying embayed between curving shores, the moonlight showing thick clumps of trees, with a dark line of cultivated fields bordering on glittering sand-hills. But the sight of a long, low steamer with two funnels, lying in a sheltered creek, excited some surprise and a little uneasiness in the captain's mind. From the general view of the coast line as marked down in the charts, the captain was convinced that the estuary was that of the Sebou, marked as dangerous with shifting sands, and bordered by ferocious, inhospitable tribes.

And thus the captain was anxious to put out to sea as soon as he could, but the time of high water passed, and the defect in the engines was still not made good, and another twelve hours must elapse before the boat could pass the harbour bar. And this was Captain Rohan's opportunity. Here he would be put ashore, for at this point he was actually in contact with what might be called Bensadi's country, and the scene of those disturbances which his enterprise had occasioned. Luckily there was a negro hand on board who knew the country, and as he was willing to act as guide, the captain consented to spare him, although strongly dissuading Rohan from the undertaking; but Rohan having made up his mind, the good mariner gave him every possible assistance. He rigged him out with clothes of native pattern, supplied him with an assortment of cutlery, which was to be his stock in trade, for Rohan was to make-believe as a pedlar, or itinerant trader, while the black acted as his servant. Fortunately, Rohan, having served a while at Gibraltar, had acquired, in sporting excursions on the opposite coast, a knowledge of the Hispano-Moorish dialect which is current among the mixed populations. As for his complexion, there are golden-haired, blue-eyed people among the Moors, descendants, perhaps, of a Gothic race who traversed, if they did not permanently occupy, the country.

To satisfy curiosity, as well as possibly to gain intelligence, a visit was paid to the

steamer with two funnels which was lying, apparently deserted, in a neighbouring creek. As they approached they were hailed by an English voice from one of the port-holes. It was the engineer of the steamer, who warned them not to come too near, for there was a Moorish guard on board, mostly asleep, but who when roused would fire recklessly around. He and his two mates, the firemen, were not exactly prisoners, and did not want to get away, for they were well paid and well treated. But it was a queer job they were on. They had brought a big swell of an Arab from England, with a young lady, who was to be married to him in a fortnight's time, when there was to be a big feast up the country, that all the bloomin' niggers were going to be at.

At this point one of the Moorish guards awoke, and pointed a rifle threateningly at the boat's crew, who thought it best to sheer off, no further molestation being offered. But Rohan had heard enough to guide him in his plans, and added to his stock a collection of showy Birmingham jewellery, such as was likely to be in demand on festive occasions. And he would make his way to the marriage feast, an uninvited guest, trusting to the good fortune which had hitherto favoured him for some means of rescuing Titania.

A boat took Rohan's packages ashore and then returned for him and Muley, his negro boy. Rohan shook the captain warmly by the hand, who promised to look out for him in Tangier, but who evidently did not expect to see his face again. The engineer of the steamer had now mastered the leak in the steam-pipe, and as soon as the adventurers were landed they heard the rattle of the anchor chain, and saw the steamer presently put out to sea.

#### CHAPTER X. THE TREASURE CHAMBER.

ROHAN'S progress across the disturbed country of the revolted tribes, dangerous as it was, did not prove difficult. The country was lovely, resembling English landscape, with the added charm of sub-tropical vegetation. In the villages the inhabitants, although often surly and suspicious, were not unwilling to trade, and the women especially flocked about Rohan eager to examine his wares and chatter and gossip over the trinkets that he showed them. It was only necessary to propitiate the sheik, or head man, with a few silver

dollars to obtain his protection over the whole of his district. Parties of fighting men on one side or the other would have held such protection lightly enough, but these they generally had notice of, and managed to avoid. Muley proved an excellent fellow, and having gone through the ceremony of swearing fealty to his master over the skin of a black ram, might be relied upon to the death. With a couple of good mules they travelled at a speed of twelve or fourteen miles a day, and before long they were close to the forest regions that clothed the bases of the mysterious Atlas range, which they had kept in view from the first. Among these it was known that the new Shereef had pitched his camp. Hitherto there had been more talking than fighting among the Arab tribes, but they were all on the swarm, fierce and headstrong, and ready to shed anybody's blood on the slightest provocation.

To escape these fighting men, who would have plundered them of everything, and probably cut them down with their scimitars or used them as targets for rifle practice, Rohan and Muley took everywhere their way through the forest, by paths only known to natives of the district. And here again Rohan was continually reminded of English forest scenery. Ancient tumuli, too, crowned the hills, and there were here and there to be found mysterious circles, like that of Bedgebury Ring, with the long monolith in the centre, but in most cases still standing on end.

One evening the travellers arrived at a summit where the camp of the Shereef lay in full view. Here stood the white tents with gay streamers fluttering in the breeze, and two richly-decorated pavilions, which, according to Muley, were destined for the use of the bride and bridegroom. Horses were picketed here and there, and dusky horsemen in white burnouses were arriving or departing. On a piece of level sward a number of young men on horseback were engaged in martial exercises. Outside the tents, on glowing charcoal fires, women and slaves were preparing the evening meal, and as sunset fell the call of the muezzin was heard in its plaintive charm, and the whole population of the camp turned their faces towards Meccah, and for a few minutes were engaged in silent prayer.

Effective as this might have been as an operatic scene, its reality fell with chilling effect on one of the observers. The odds



against him were too great. And how should he enter into the camp of his enemy—as a spy or as an assassin? No, his soldier's blood revolted at the thought. And then he touched the talisman, and forthwith the thought of what Titania was enduring nerved him afresh. And then Muley spoke.

"Master, I will go down into the camp with a basket of trinkets, and I will say they are a gift for the bride. And then they will bring me to her. But if I cannot get speech of her, is there any jewel you can place among the trinkets that she will surely know as yours?"

Ah, yes, was there not the talisman?

That was an excellent plan of Muley's. He would pass in and out of the camp without exciting suspicion. With the early morning light Muley departed on his mission; it was nearly noon before he returned, his black face mantling with smiles. He brought provisions, which were sorely needed; he brought a purse of gold which the beautiful maiden had given him in acknowledgement of his presents. The maiden was strictly watched, and he could not get speech with her, but she had passed by him, and as she passed she repeated certain cabalistic words which he had repeated to himself ever since, till in the excitement of telling the story he had forgotten them!

Rohan looked at the negro in blank despair, whose eyes almost rolled out of his head, while perspiration covered his forehead, in his efforts to recall the charmed words. At last he gasped out:

"Intitanya," and then he stopped; he could do no more. Rohan, turning the sounds over in his mind, grappling the problem with every faculty stretched, memory, imagination, the love he bore the girl, which surely now should fertilise his brain, suddenly shouted out:

"In Titania's Bower."

The negro laughed aloud, a long, ringing laugh.

"Dat's it, master!"

Yes, Rohan's understanding had been fertilised, he remembered that sweet, stolen meeting in the Ring that had been known as Titania's Bower. The hour, it was sunset; the place—why, surely in the immediate neighbourhood of the camp there was just such another ring as that in the New Forest. He was as sure of it as if he had seen it, and when he described the place to Muley, the negro laughed aloud again. Yes, he knew the place well,

and would take the master there right away. They skirted the camp, keeping well out of sight, till they arrived at the opposite side, which was quieter, being appropriated to the wives of the chiefs, and came nearer the edge of the forest. And here they came upon a scene which startled Rohan by its resemblance to a similar place in Hampshire. There were the encircling trees, the ring of turf, and even the central stone, and like that at Bagebury broken into three pieces. Here Rohan would stay till he met Titania; sooner or later they would meet, and death only should part them.

As sunset approached there was a noise of chattering voices in the woods; the chief Arab ladies and their attendants had come out to enjoy the fresh evening air and the scent of the fragrant shrubs.

"Ah, do not go there," cried one, as a female form appeared in the mystic ring; "it is haunted by goblins."

But the figure in white advanced. It was Titania, and Rohan clasped her in his arms.

But there was not a moment to lose. The mules were at hand, and the contents of their pack-saddles were scattered on the ground. One mule for Titania, one for Cobweb, who now appeared smiling and yet shivering with fright. But just as these preparations were completed, there was a laughing, screaming stampede among the women, and the white bernouses of perhaps a hundred Arab horsemen surrounded the skirts of the wood. There was nothing for it but to await events, for the way of retreat was now cut off. Rohan satisfied himself that his revolver was ready for action. The negro threw himself upon his face, and sinuously crept among the bushes.

"Yes, he was right to save his skin, poor fellow," said Rohan.

Out of the troop of horsemen rode forth a dignified figure in ample turban and voluminous white garments; yet it was easy to recognise Bensadi, although he looked every inch the chief and patriarch. He alighted at the margin of the circle, and none of his attendants followed him beyond that line. Bensadi advanced to the central stone, carrying in his hand a pan of incense, which he lighted with a glowing piece of charcoal, so that in a few moments a dense but fragrant smoke enveloped him, and he was quite hidden from his attendants, although Rohan could dimly see his motions. Laying aside his

scimitar, Bensadi stooped towards the middle fragment of the stone, and with the greatest apparent ease turned it over. An opening was revealed beneath, into which Bensadi was about to descend, when suddenly through the vapour was seen the flash of steel, and Bensadi fell forward on his face.

Next moment Muley crept up to his master, wiping the jewelled scimitar on the grass.

"Muley do dat for his master," he said grimly. "Now we get along."

The confusion and uproar of the moment favoured their escape, they regained the other side of the camp unobserved, and pushing quickly through tangled forest paths, soon left the camp far behind them. Yet the real perils of the march had only just commenced. Muley and Rohan had agreed that the route to Tangier was hopeless. In that direction would the pursuers, and the avengers of blood, naturally flock; and that way there were no forest tracts to conceal their flight. But as they approached the coast, following the route to the mouth of the river Sebou, they found that the whole country had been roused in pursuit of them.

Yet the country was wide, and thanks to Muley's knowledge of localities, the fugitives contrived to elude the clouds of white-robed horsemen who galloped here and there. But in crossing the sandy plain which stretched between the hills and the coast, they were marked down by some flying scout, and soon surrounded by a cordon of horsemen, who gradually closed in upon them. Luckily night fell upon the scene before the operation was completed, and fearful of losing their victims in the darkness, the Arabs contented themselves with lighting fires all round and keeping watch all night long.

Hopeless indeed and miserable seemed the lot of the fugitives. The morning light would reveal them to their pursuers. Titania would have had Rohan promise to shoot her, rather than she should fall into the hands of the Arabs; but Rohan would not promise. They had hoped to secure a native boat and put out for Tangier; but now that was impossible; every boat had been impounded. Keeping as far as possible from the line of fires that encompassed them, they came down to the water's edge and gazed hopelessly at the river and the starlit sky, when one of them perceived a faint glow in the water. It was a light from one of the port-holes of a steamer

which had hitherto been concealed from them by the sand-hills. The long, low steamer with two funnels was still lying there.

"This is my business," said Rohan, holding back Muley, who was about to plunge into the river. He kissed Titania, grasped the hands of Muley and Cobweb, and let himself softly glide into the water.

The others watched intently from the bank; not a sound did they hear. If a ripple glittered in the starlight they started and shivered. Hours seemed to pass, and yet not more than twenty minutes had elapsed when the keel of a boat grated against the shore.

"By God's help we are saved," whispered Rohan as he helped the others on board.

In a few words he told them what had happened. The Moorish guard he had found asleep on the settees in the captain's cabin. He had fastened them in and liberated the three Englishmen who had been battened down in the hold. These were now mounting guard over the sleeping guard. In a few moments the rest were all safely on board. The engine fires were lighted, steam was getting up. In three hours the tide would be at the full and the boat might start. But in three hours also it would be sunrise.

The sun rose gloriously out of the ocean, which was almost calm and of deep cerulean hue. It disclosed the cordon of horsemen, who, having performed their devotions, sprang to their saddles and began skilfully to close in upon the sand-hills. The first roar of escaping steam as the boat began to move must have showed them their mistake. A group of chiefs gathered in consultation, and then there was a general gallop towards the most outlying promontory. The channel here was narrow—not a hundred yards across. The steamer would have to run the gauntlet of fire.

Muley was at the wheel, which was on the enclosed conning bridge in the centre of the ship. Rohan covered him with his person, for Muley was now the one vital point for the ship's safety. Titania insisted also in being on the bridge. She would share the others' danger. She had charge of the engine-room indicator, and her first signal was "Full steam ahead!" The craft was one of the racers of the seas, built by a celebrated firm, with a guaranteed speed of thirty miles an hour. The foam rushed from her cutwater in a mighty fountain as she ran for the narrow channel

amid the shrieks, yells, and curses of the Arabs on shore.

Hardly would any on deck have escaped the shower of bullets had it not been for an ingenious device of Muley's. There was a steering-wheel in the once usual place in the stern, to be used if the other tackle broke down, and against this Muley had rigged up a dummy, who stood very naturally by the wheel. The Arabs, judging rightly that if they killed the steersman the steamer would probably run aground, directed their chief fire upon the dummy, knocking the dust out of his coat in dozens of bullet-holes. Rohan was grazed by a bullet. None of the others were touched. And once on the open sea they were only three days from home.

#### CHAPTER XI. QUEEN OF THE FOREST.

SOFT autumnal sunshine was resting upon the forest slopes and on the square ivy-covered tower of Bolder Church. The churchyard path had been hastily strewn with flowers and fragrant twigs, and a group of villagers were assembled on either side of the porch to see the bridal procession pass out. That Miss Herondale was to marry Captain Rohan had for some time been known all over the forest; but the ceremony had been shorn of all its usual adornments owing to the recent death of Titania's father. Yet was the function graced by the presence of Lord and Lady Gilchurch, and their only son Lord Camlan, who were not the least interested spectators of the ceremony.

"You don't mind, Osmond," said Titania, when the ceremony was over, as the whole party stood together about the entrance to the little side chapel, where surplices were hung and the registers were kept, "and we shall be just as good chums as ever?"

Osmond was not quite sure, feeling indeed a little sore about the matter altogether. And as for Lady Gilchurch, she seemed to be fairly overcome with agitation, and when Titania offered her cheek to be kissed, my lady looked as pale as a ghost.

"Is it peace?" she asked in a hollow whisper.

"Yes, and forgiveness," replied Titania.

When Lord Gilchurch had signed as one of the witnesses, the clerk of the church remarked that, although they had not many such distinguished names to boast of, yet the name of Herondale occurred in the register just eighteen years before.

"Oh, let me look," said Titania; and there she saw her father's name coupled with another almost illegible. "Look, Bertie," she said to her husband, and Lord Gilchurch was also fumbling for his eye-glasses to see what the entry might be. At that moment Titania caught a glance from Lady Gilchurch so terror-stricken and imploring, that Titania dropped the volume, which fell with a great crash on the floor. But Captain Rohan had caught sight of the entry, and it had given him extreme delight. Bensadi had lied to him when he had said that Titania was only the natural daughter of Mr. Herondale.

As soon as the bride and bridegroom had driven off, the Gilchurch carriage went too, but not in the same direction. Lady Gilchurch had found that the air of Ambrehurst did not agree with her, although it had proved so beneficial to her son, and now she starts on a lengthened tour, which is to embrace the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coast of America. Sooner than allow herself to be identified as the woman who married Stanley Herondale, and who became the mother of Titania, Lady Gilchurch will remain for ever exiled from the world in which she has moved, and separated from the son for whose sake she was ready to sin and to suffer.

As soon as Captain Rohan and Titania reached Bolder Hatch, they found that they were not to be let off so quietly as they had expected. The white gate had been taken off its hinges and replaced by a triumphal arch in green boughs, and wreaths of ivy adorned the time-worn gateway. And the melancholy-looking board, which had for some weeks past been stuck there announcing that this desirable property was for sale, "by order of the mortgagees," had now been split up into fragments as part of the materials for a bonfire, which was to be presently lit in honour of the wedding.

For it was now an open secret that Miss Herondale—as was—had recovered a considerable part of her father's fortune. For the steamer with the double funnels, having exhausted her coal on the run home, it was found that concealed in the coal bunkers were a number of boxes of specie, just as they had been forwarded from the Bank of England on Mr. Herondale's order. Doubtless Joseph Bensadi had thought it best to provide himself with the means of retreat, in case he found his position among

his tribesmen growing dangerous. Indeed, it may be doubted whether he had not the intention of making his escape so soon as he had possessed himself of the contents of the treasure chamber, of which Sir Thomas Herondale had only carried off a fraction.

The late Sir Thomas's papers, now in Titania's possession, indicate clearly enough the exact position of Omar's treasure, and the chamber which had been built for it beneath the secret shrine of the imaum—in the centre of the ring of turf in the distant forests of Morocco. And there, doubtless, it still exists, but whether plundered or intact it is impossible to say.

But no long stay was to be made at Bolder Hatch. Everything was to be left untouched, said Titania, till she came back. Thomas was to exercise the horses, and see that the "Gem" was painted, caulked, and made seaworthy for her next voyage. The double-funnelled monster that had so nearly caught her was to be sold. For now they were going, the newly married pair, to make a leisurely tour by way of France and the Mediterranean towards Gibraltar, where Captain Rohan was to take up his appointment. But only for three years; and then they would come back to the Forest for evermore.

"Ah, yes, my dear little lady, you must come back to us," cried Sidonia—now Mrs. Spot. "The forest won't be the forest without you. We've crowned you the queen of it now, my dear," and Sidonia threw into the open carriage a chaplet of forest leaves jewelled with berries just coloured by the sun of autumn.

The hardy foresters cheered; Muley and Cobweb on the back seat smiled back approvingly; Thomas whipped up his horses, and away they went "over the hills and far away."

## AUTUMN LEAVES.

### A DESPERADO OF THE CHILTERN HILLS.

AFTER all, it was Nan's "man of the mountains" who snapped a coil of unscrupulous revenge, and Nan and another were the gainers.

"What could I do but help him, poacher and vagabond though he is? You could not leave him to lie up there, in pain and helpless, till somebody found him next morning?"

"Certainly not. I expect any of us would have done the same."

Nan Covington rewarded the speaker with a flash from her eloquent eyes. He thought he had never seen her look so pretty as when, with the rose-red colour on her cheeks and stealing into her low, broad brow, she steadfastly declined to bear the title of "Donna Quixote."

It was a simple incident in one of those wide, free rambles which are a feature of life in an English country house. Nan and her mother were guests at Terrick Manor. A party had gone out riding on the downs. Nan was a laggard, pausing at the highest points to drink in the beauty of the fair, autumn-hued landscape that stretched like a panorama below these heights of the Chilterns. She had been introduced to a wholly new Bucks wonderland, and marvelled that people in London knew so little of what was very near them. Taking a specially steep "bit" to rejoin her friends by a short cut—for it must be confessed that Nan was a random horsewoman—she had found a big, hulking fellow with a sprained ankle. A block of earth had been dislodged, and man and mould had crashed many yards together. Nan's pity offered aid, though he never asked it. She dismounted and gave him a girlish arm to lean upon, and somehow he had reached the track hard by, and then Nan walked away to some cottages half a mile distant, and ensured for him more stalwart assistance.

"For my arm will be stiff for a week," she said, laughing as she told the story.

Nan was assured that she had befriended the greatest scoundrel in the district—the leader of a gang of hillside ruffians, who were always ready for a midnight visit to the preserves of Terrick Manor.

"That's Black Sam Pewsey to a T," said Squire Milne, as Nan described the sufferer.

Mrs. Covington was thereupon duly indignant.

"Nan does the strangest things!" she said.

And only Captain Fairlie had cared to controvert the theory that Nan was eccentric. The girl was grateful, and there was henceforth a favour for the latest comer which was like strong wine to a fainting man.

It was a surprise to Captain Fairlie to meet Nan here. They were old acquaintances of a furlough spent in Jersey. Into one heart love had consciously come then.



But he was poor, and had a hazy outlook, and Nan was old Colonel Covington's niece and heiress. Jim Fairlie recognised the barrier. If he had been blind, the tart-tongued dowager who snubbed Nan and him impartially would soon have pointed it out.

Since then he had won his step in the Soudan, and wealth had come in his way from a maternal kinsman long lost sight of amongst Australian sheep-folds. But he had been an exile in the desert, and expected that Nan was married long since. The frank, vivacious girls with money are always picked up.

Captain Fairlie came home on a steamer with Cecil Milne, a wounded subaltern.

"You'll run down to Terrick Manor? It's fresh ground to you?"

"Yes, entirely."

"Then promise to come. You won't find us deadly dull. The governor always has a house party in the autumn, and I'll guarantee you sensations in pretty faces."

The older man had smiled rather wanly at that. A fortune is a fortune at any time, but it may come too late, and carry chagrin upon its wings. He was rich now; but there was only one girl's face passing fair to him. Where was Nan?

No music could have thrilled him as the soft, rich voice, with the faint suspicion of distance, did when he arrived at Terrick Manor.

"We are ancient friends, I think, Captain Fairlie."

Yes, and they got on capitally together now, until a whisper was carried to the soldier's ears which stifled his new hopes.

"Miss Covington is so gay already that one wonders how her spirits can be higher when Mr. Stanton arrives," said a dry, wizened little woman, who perhaps saw a dangerous drama unfolding in these perpetual picnics.

"Mr. Stanton?" repeated the listener she had caught in a corner.

"Yes; I can't tell you who he is; nobody seems to know much about him—except Mrs. Covington. He is to marry Miss Covington, you know. I believe they met abroad—Baden-Baden, or some of those places. I hear he is very rich, and that Mrs. Covington thinks it a grand match for Nan. But we shall see—those of us who stay. He joins us in a fortnight."

How soon a lover's house of cards stands in fine and flowing outline on the table-land of fancy; how soon it is in ruins! The light faded out of Captain Fairlie's sky. His past pessimism was justified.

Good luck in the common view had visited him, but every boon it brought was tithed by a bitter chagrin.

He talked of going, but he did not go. For one thing Cecil Milne would not hear of it; and for another he was a lonely man, and here was a point of warmth and brightness. Captain Fairlie had no waiting home circle to go to. Moreover, he was pleased with his refuge in these "Chiltern Hundreds" of historic fame.

That Bucks was a charming sylvan county he was vaguely aware before. But he had no idea of the beauty of the woodlands in their golden autumn dress, of the fine air and far distances of the great rolling crests which sweep round from Aston Hills on the west side of Tring to Whiteleaf Cross at Risborough, or of the hundred quaintnesses of the sequestered, old-world villages. It was all unhackneyed, naïve, delightful. He stood on Velvet Lawn, by the flagstaff, and his eye ranged over the rich pastures of the whole vale of Aylesbury, and away to the west towards the pleasant plains of Oxford. Scarcely a day passed without his stumbling on a new vista of leafy loveliness, or a fresh vantage-ground from which to study a unique blending of the finest features of the softer British scenery.

Captain Fairlie was growing curious to see Nan's accepted lover. It argued indifference that day after day he should disappoint expectation. The business affairs in Yorkshire that were understood to be keeping him were probably the Doncaster races. But startling events were, first, to divert every one's thoughts from the loiterer, and then to bring them back to him when the thing seemed least likely.

There was a burglary at Terrick Manor, and Mrs. Covington lost the brilliants which she always carried with her on her rural campaigns. They were worth a large sum of money, though not equivalent, as she loudly asserted, to the purchase price of the Manor estate. It was a disaster that made her frantic, and Nan trembled with shame at her unjust accusations of carelessness, and at the reckless insinuations in which she indulged.

"Somebody on the spot must have had a hand in it," she said angrily, "somebody who saw me wearing them, and took good care to find out which was my room and where I locked them up. It's a vile plot, with one thread here in the house. I feel sure of it."

But the visitors were nearly all gone now. Squire Milne's remaining guests were only Miss Parks and Captain Fairlie, Nan, and Mrs. Covington herself. And there was not a servant on the place for whose integrity the Squire would not have answered with his own. He did not choose the people about him at random or change them for a whim. They were old retainers.

These facts made Mrs. Covington's assertion seem absurd to him. He dealt with it in a dignified, courteous way which Nan, at least, appreciated.

"I am very sorry it has happened under my roof," he said; "that is a misfortune which I shall feel, madam, in its own degree as much as you will feel yours. My family share these sentiments. But I submit that you have no evidence whatever for a charge which, if it means anything, must mean that perhaps my son Cecil has given information to the rogues, or that I am a conspirator, or that some one quite as little likely in my opinion to do these things is guilty. I do not believe that."

Mrs. Covington had the grace to be momentarily abashed.

"Of course, that is nonsense," she muttered, "I never said so. But it is a dreadful thing, a shameful thing; and I suppose it is true that it has happened? I wish it were not. The thieves knew where to go. If they were not put up to it, how came they to guess that there was such a chance? That is what I ask, and what nobody answers."

"In the absence of a clue it cannot be answered," remarked Captain Fairlie.

The irate woman turned upon him.

"You went away directly it came out that I was robbed. Perhaps you fancy I am blind, Captain Fairlie. You were never more mistaken in your life. I have seen a great deal. I feel inclined to ask if you are certain that no clue is forthcoming. What are your ideas about it? Where did you go to?"

When Mrs. Covington commenced she was consciously striking wild blows. It was an ebullition of resentment without aim or meaning, except to sting the subject of the assault. But it was a fact that she was on the whole a capable observer, and she soon noticed that her charge of withdrawal told. Captain Fairlie looked confused. By sheer instinct she brought her hints to a head, and confronted him with a direct question.

His bronzed face had annoyance visibly written in its lines. Even Nan, who with impatient disgust had come over to him from her mother's side and whispered pitifully, "Please take no notice," even Nan wondered at the dark, preoccupied countenance. And his answer seemed weak and a shuffle.

"I went into Terrick. There was nothing to gain by my staying. If there had been I would have stayed."

Cecil Milne, who was nearly strong again, gazed at his friend curiously. Did he not understand that this mad old dowager had impugned his honour?

The foe caught at the quibble and exposed it. She was seriously coming to believe that Captain Fairlie was mixed up in the robbery, preposterous as the notion seemed to every one else in the group.

"Oh, indeed! You had not interest enough in the matter to join in the investigation? I think, sir, that will seem strange to all here."

Squire Milne interrupted.

"I must ask you to remember, Mrs. Covington, that Captain Fairlie is my guest," he said significantly. "Probably on reflection you will agree that this has gone far enough."

"No; I shall not think so until I have back what I have lost. And I am glad that Mr. Stanton will be here this afternoon. I shall put it all into his hands—all; do you hear, Captain Fairlie?"

He bowed gravely. His reserve continued, and was inexplicable to Cecil Milne, and to Nan.

It was supposed that Mrs. Covington's room in the west wing of the Manor had been surreptitiously entered late on the previous evening. She had gone along a corridor after retiring and stayed nearly an hour with Nan, persuading the girl to fix a date almost immediately for her marriage. Mr. Stanton pressed for this in a letter Nan had received, and which also stated that he might be expected on the morrow. The theory which seemed to have least difficulties was that the thief had come in through a window in a deep oriel of the corridor, and had escaped the same way. Access to this from below was easy by reason of a mass of climbing ivy plants—a natural ladder was provided for nimble feet—and this window was found forced.

The police accepted this hypothesis and were working upon it, examining, with a great show of importance, the outdoor staff

of the Manor, and seeking for the trail of any suspicious prowler who might have been seen in the locality. Their results so far were not made public.

At four o'clock a carriage went to the station to meet Mr. Stanton. Nan was inside. Heavy rain had fallen, and the September air was sharp and fresh. The girl had a grey wrap round her shoulders. It suited her perfectly, but it was a pallid, anxious face that Captain Fairlie met by accident. Nan had no need, surely, to wear the old hateful mask here, where spectators were only the country people. She was letting all the sad foreboding of her heart steal into her eyes when at the very cottages from which she had once secured assistance for the poacher, Pewsey, she passed Captain Fairlie. He knew where she was going, and her hopeless face was a revelation to him. The strange thing was that his own brightened proportionally. He was standing a yard or two from the curve of the road, on a rustic path leading to a clump of the magnificent beeches with which Bucks abounds. The girl saw with a start that his companion was the man whom Squire Milne called Black Sam, and that there was gold on Sam's palm. It was very distantly that she returned the soldier's salute. For the first time she had a sharp doubt whether Captain Fairlie was a man of honour. What legitimate relations could he have with one who was almost an outlaw—certainly an Ishmael of the Chilterns? It was one thing to aid Black Sam in distress and in ignorance of his character. She would do that again. It was another thing to bribe him for perhaps a lawless act. Were her mother's brilliants involved? Even this bright, beautiful Bucks world seemed grey, and barren of peace and joy, to Nan at that moment. Then she rebuked herself for the thought.

Mr. Eugene Stanton was introduced to a broken and dispirited party. Nan, who was nervously watching, fancied that there was a gleam as of contempt, and something else that she could not fathom, in Captain Fairlie's eyes. Could it be triumph? How should that have any place? Was not the victory Mr. Stanton's by her own word of surrender?

A conference about the burglary was soon held apart. It was interrupted by the announcement of a capture.

"Black Sam Pewsey and his son are in custody," was the information brought in by Cecil Milne.

The Squire shook his head solemnly at Nan. The girl was the old man's favourite, though he was learning to detest her mother.

"You see what your protégé is worth," he said, "for all you did him a good turn. But it's queer. I dare say they've some good evidence. But I didn't think the villains would soar to a job of this sort. A bit of poaching, and some ugly work if the keepers came along, is quite in their way. But this is different altogether. It is a surprise."

The police were sure of their ground, and they brought to light a body of testimony to show that both prisoners were loitering in the Manor park, and in the footpath that led to the tennis ground, late the previous evening. And two servants deposed to seeing Black Sam in forbidden precincts—close to the house. He had, indeed, terrified them. But the jewels were not found. The miserable novel on the hillside had been searched in vain.

Nan and Captain Fairlie exchanged a glance that on one side was a question, and on the other an appeal. Each knew it to be so.

"What had you to do there?" Nan's steadfast eyes asked. "Trust me a little longer," said the Captain's. And Nan was silent, and her faith stood the test. However things might look, she knew at length that this man had her supreme confidence, and more—her love. Oh, why had she yielded to her mother's urging?

But Mr. Stanton, whose consternation at hearing of the robbery was great, became an amateur detective, as Mrs. Covington suggested, and following her cue also with respect to Captain Fairlie, he unearthed the highly suspicious circumstance of the visit paid by Fairlie to Pewsey's cottage.

He demanded an explanation in the presence of the Squire, who was more indignant, and uneasy, and perplexed than he cared even to confess to Cecil.

"Will you deny that you paid money to this scamp?"

"Certainly I shall not deny it."

The tones were haughty and stern.

"Money to a notorious law-breaker! To leave the country, perhaps? Will you kindly account for such strange conduct at such a peculiar time?"

Captain Fairlie had a telegram in his hand; it had just been delivered. He

carelessly referred to it. It had been delayed.

"In about half an hour, I should think, it will be possible to oblige you," he said. There was a ring at the bell. He walked to the window and his manner changed.

"The farce will probably change to a serious drama here and now," he said.

"Colonel Covington," was announced. The name was like a thunderbolt to the man who had supposed himself safe when the ground was mined beneath him. He rose but could not stand. He sank back into his chair and waited for the stroke of doom. His heavy features grew ashen; his teeth began to chatter. He was a trickster of many subterfuges, and a craven at heart.

Nan's uncle was a soldier with a presence. His sixty years sat lightly upon him. He had had desperate work committed to his hands, and had never flinched. To crush a traitor was a bagatelle.

He nodded to Captain Fairlie. Another Jim Fairlie—this one's father—and he had gone through the Mutiny together; and he knew the son. He shook hands warmly with Squire Milne and Cecil. It was not his first visit to Terrick Manor. Then he faced round on another old acquaintance.

"I have come post haste from Dublin through your leafy lanes, Milne, to strip a very shady bird of borrowed plumage," he said. "This man, who, I hear, calls himself Mr. Stanton, is well known to me. He was cashiered from my own regiment eight years ago. His name is Willis Dorrell. I have not heard anything good of him since the colours and he parted. It is not my province to interfere with any guest of yours, Milne, but I don't want you to be deceived."

Dorrell stumbled to his feet with a curse.

"It was your doing that I was sent adrift," he hissed.

"It was justice, sir, and you know it."

"You were hard—hard; and if it hadn't been for Fairlie yonder I'd have had my revenge. I'd have married your niece. May I say good-bye to Nan?"

It was a last flash of bravado. Now the crash had come, the miscreant's spirits revived. But he walked to the door as he spoke. There was mischief in the set of Jim Fairlie's mouth, and he saw it.

"And now, Squire, you shall have my story—the story which that impostor has wisely thought it unnecessary to wait for, though he is pretty frequently involved,"

said Captain Fairlie, a little later, addressing his host and his host's son. "It will mean, at all events, a partial revision of your judgement in the case of the Pewsays. Black Sam had no more to do with the disappearance of Mrs. Covington's brilliants than—I had"—there was a proud upward twist in the voice—"but he had a considerable share in the counter-plot by which Dorrell has been worsted, and by which I hope and believe Mrs. Covington will have her treasures restored."

"You don't say so!" cried the Squire. "Was Stanton in that affair too?"

"No, he was not. But he was harassed by a racing dun as unscrupulous as himself. This is what occurred. On the day of the robbery I had been to Ivinghoe to see the quaint village on the hill which may have given its title to Scott's 'Ivanhoe.' It is well worth a trip. Well, at Chaddington I was waiting for an Aylesbury train. I sat down in a corner, sheltered from the rain that was beginning, to scribble a letter. Voices reached me. They were on the other side of a wooden partition with an open window in it. Nan's name was mentioned—I mean Miss Covington."

"Yes," said Cecil Milne unnecessarily; and he smiled furtively.

"I picked up my ears. One speaker was putting pressure on the other to get money. He threatened him with exposure. The other slowly gave way. He was going to marry Miss Covington—it would be soon, he said—then the money should be paid. He could do little at the moment, but he was anxious that Colonel Covington should not cross his path, and had a fear that the Colonel was at Terrick Manor. He persuaded the other to come and investigate for him, and the task was undertaken. Where Dorrell went I do not know. They were to meet at an inn late that night. I saw them on the platform, and yesterday Dorrell knew me again. I came to Terrick almost as soon as the spy, and as I might want witnesses, I tipped the younger Peway to spy on Fenning—that was his name. Incidentally I mentioned the name of Dorrell in Black Sam's hearing. He understood that Miss Covington was concerned, and he was grateful to Miss Covington. And Black Sam is an ex-soldier. I had found that out before, for it was not our first talk. He gave me a startling clue. He was in the ranks of the very regiment



from which Dorrell was disgraced for malversation and fraud. On that I wired Colonel Covington perhaps half-a-dozen times. And meanwhile the burglary was committed. Fenning was the burglar. Young Peway watched him at the window, but did not then know anything about the jewels. When Mrs. Covington's loss was discovered I took steps to have Fenning traced at once. He has been taken by this time, I hope. But the main thing in my view was to thwart Dorrell. Colonel Covington took that in hand."

It was a tremendous humiliation for the domineering woman, who, wedded absolutely to her own selection of a suitor for Nan, had nearly succeeded in giving her daughter to an adventurer. But Mrs. Covington's cup was not all bitter. Captain Fairlie's promptness restored to her the treasures which she had bemoaned. The man she had wantonly insulted scarcely knew whether audacity or adroitness was most marked when she thanked him with great geniality, and said:

"They will be Nan's one day, Captain Fairlie, so she ought to thank you, too."

And Nan did, in a formal pretty fashion all her own, then. The gaiety in her manner was chastened. A touch of melancholy was about her. Later—a month later, and in town—she thanked him in a fashion of his choosing.

"You might have spoilt my plans if you had spoken of what you saw amongst the Bucks bracken that day," he said. "Was it that you trusted me against all appearances?"

"Yes."

It was a very shy yet happy whisper.

"Behind such confidence there is sometimes love," he dared to go on. "Was it so, Nan?"

There was no answer. The silence seemed full of meaning.

"Perhaps I ought not to ask you that. I will put it otherwise, if you will let me. Will you be my wife, Nan?"

The small head drooped. She was in his arms, and there was no need of the rich, faint, "Yes, Jim." He was victor.

## PAMELA AND PRUE.

### CHAPTER I.

"REALLY, Miss Jardine, you ain't got any kind of tact with the poor child. He's as good as gold when Pamela is by. But you've no notion of managin' him, and

you're that inconsiderate of his little ways that—— John Jeremiah!"

The shrill Yankee voice was raised into a scream of dismay and anger to reach the other end of the long dining-room of the "Hôtel de Bretagne," in which the speaker stood scolding her governess.

"John Jeremiah, git off that table this instant, I say! You've eaten enough fruit already to be ill for a week, and you so bad yesterday with all those sweets. Get down, you naughty boy," and Mrs. John J. Spragge, of Chicago, made a dart down the room to the farther end of the long dining table, set for déjeuner, which was being pillaged by her son and heir, aged ten, who had taken advantage of Miss Jardine "catching it" to stuff his pockets with the fruit in the dishes.

"What is the matter, ma?" asked Pamela, entering with languid grace.

She spoke with a decided Yankee drawl, but she might have been Diana herself, as she appeared in the days when the earth was young to the eyes of men.

"I guess he has been up to some mischief," she went on calmly. "What's he been up to now, ma?"

Her mother looked at her with mingled respect and half-reproachful admiration.

"The poor child only wanted some plums, and—— You just go right away and see that he's all right," turning sharply to Miss Jardine; "and I do think you might try and manage him a little better."

"Nonsense, ma," said Miss Pamela Spragge calmly; "he's the tiresomest little imp I've ever seen, and it's about time he was made to mind somebody. He wants to be cuffed now and then, and I wonder Miss Jardine don't do it when your back is turned. I would—if I didn't like to do it before your face."

Mrs. J. J. Spragge's face was a study as she stood struggling between anger at the very thought of the hapless governess perpetrating such an enormity, and the half-admiring, half-awed obedience she yielded in all matters to her calm-willed beautiful daughter, who had ruled her ever since she could walk.

She was further vaguely discomfited by a soft laugh from the governess in question, as if the idea of cuffing the sacred person of John Jeremiah had awakened intense amusement, rather than humble horror, in her mind.

"I'm just sure I don't know what I keep you for, Miss Jardine," she said; "you ain't no manner of use to me, as I

see, and I'm sure that dear John Jeremiah hasn't learned——"

"Ma, don't talk so loudly, and there's Lord Acres outside," interposed the calm and beautiful Pamela, turning in the direction of the doorway, on the threshold of which at that moment appeared a slight, trim-looking young man, of rather effeminate appearance. "There he is," all in the same tone, as if this exhibition of loud vulgarity and petty insolence on her mother's part before her fastidious patrician lover in no way disconcerted her.

"Cyril!" as he seemed to hesitate for a second on the threshold, with something blank on his face, which she took for shocked disapproval, "come in. It is about time you made the acquaintance of my mother, I think," with a slight laugh. It was difficult to say in what it lay, but as she spoke there was something in her tone or manner which gave her a little touch of quiet pride, and added inestimably to her charm and grace. The heiress of the self-made millionaire was lost in the dignity of the woman and daughter who was neither ashamed for herself nor for her parents, though her lover could trace his noble ancestry back to the Conquest.

Perhaps he felt it, and it reassured him, for he came forward more quickly and took the outstretched hand of his future mother-in-law, whose ruffled feelings subsided under this new excitement.

This was the first time she had seen her daughter's affianced husband. They had become engaged a week ago at an English country house where Pamela and he were staying.

Pamela had come over to her mother at Dinan two days after the engagement, and Lord Acres was to join them a day or two later. He had arrived a day earlier than he was expected, and Pamela, coming down into the hall of the hotel a few moments before, just when the storm in the dining-room was at its height, had found him there. She had only time to shake hands and then had gone to the rescue of her mother, and had caught John Jeremiah in his flight.

Miss Jardine had of course heard of the engagement. Mrs. J. J. Spragge had been far too proud and elated over it to keep it to herself; every one in the hotel had heard that "my daughter" was betrothed to an English nobleman.

Miss Jardine was apparently very weary of the subject, for she turned aside, with the faintest suspicion of disdain on her

still pale face, as Lord Acres was introduced to Mrs. J. J. Spragge, and moved towards the door.

Pamela stopped her.

"I want to introduce Lord Acres to you, Miss Jardine," she said; "I guess you two will like each other; she's real nice," with a bright laugh turning to her lover, "and—well," in the same light tone to Miss Jardine, but with something tender, like the passing of an angel's wing, shadowing her eyes, "he is rather nice, too."

Miss Jardine and Lord Acres bowed to each other, Miss Jardine's grey eyes resting quietly for a second on the sunburned face of the young man, who turned back, the instant he had acknowledged the introduction, to Mrs. J. J. Spragge, while Miss Jardine, with a smile at Pamela, left the room.

"Whatever possessed you to introduce those two like that, Pamela?" asked her mother, disturbed and vexed, as later on she talked over her future son-in-law with her daughter.

"He didn't like it, I think. He thought likely enough that you were mocking him; they are so easily ruffled up, men are. I saw him bite his lip under that dandy little moustache of his, and the back of his neck went quite red under the sun-brown. Besides, Pamela, she is only your brother's——"

"She is much better born than we are, ma," said the beautiful Pamela carelessly. "Her people were once his equals, only they got poor and emigrated; and Cyril isn't that sort. He thinks a lot of himself, but isn't mean like that! I shouldn't have taken him if he were."

"Well, I don't like that Prue Jardine myself, and what all the men seem to see in her I can't make out. She hasn't a quarter your beauty——"

"But a man would go on caring for her long after he had tired of me," said Pamela languidly. "A man who had once loved her would love her to the end."

"Nonsense, Pam," said her mother, in her indignation dropping into the old familiar appellation of the days before they had risen into fashionable society.

"I guess it isn't nonsense, ma," said Pamela, walking to the window and looking across the great Place upon which the "Hôtel de Bretagne" faced.

The sunshine of a perfect autumn afternoon flooded it, and through the golden light stirred the pulses of human life.

There a squad of soldiers marching at ease back to barracks, their roving eyes glancing roguishly at the girls as they tripped across the square with their white "bonnets" and big market baskets on their arms. There a group of little brown-faced French children in their blouses, with their close-cropped heads; pretty English girls; tourists gazing about them with their Baedeker, passing and repassing; a smiling, busy, chattering human crowd, with its setting of quaint, old-world houses.

And as Pamela gazed out upon it, her unimaginative mind was kindled by the strange new fire that had given life to her heart and soul, and she thought that though men came and went, and laughed and loved and died, that love, like the sunshine, lived on always, kindling into golden light the lives of those passing to and fro in the old Place to-day, as it had done those of that day of long ago when French and English had met and fought together in the quaint old town.

## CHAPTER II.

"It is enough to make a man mad to see it! How can you put up with it—Miss Jardine?"

There was a faint hesitation before the name, as if some other name had nearly slipped out. Lord Acres and Prue Jardine were walking side by side on the old walls under the shadow of the trees.

Prue walked on with a faintly set look in her face. This interview would have to take place some time or another, and it was best to have it over. The strain of avoiding it was too great. She braced herself up now to face it, as she would have faced the surgeon's knife.

The last time Cyril Grant, as he was called then, and she had talked alone together, had been under the starlight among the red woods at the back of a Californian store. Then he had told her how he, who had lived for the last year under her father's roof, sharing their toils, their anxieties, and the pleasures that had come even into their hard-pressed lives, had that day heard that he had come into an English earldom. The news had been so unexpected that he had, before it came, made up his mind to settle down for good in that part of the world. But all the vague, sweet understanding which had sprung up between them had suddenly ended that night under the starlight, when he told her of the change that had come into his life.

At the break of the next day he had gone away, and from that day to this they had neither seen nor heard anything of each other. That parting took place three years ago.

Some months after Acres' departure, Prue's father had died. Prue, left quite alone in the world, had taken the post of governess to the son of the millionaire, and had lived with them ever since—why or how, few people could understand. It passed the comprehension of Acres. He remembered her as a starry-eyed, high-spirited, laughing girl, and her submission to her present conditions of life was inexplicable.

"How you can put up with the tempers and cranks of that old—" Then he suddenly remembered that the old woman in question was to be his mother-in-law.

Prue, knowing perfectly what he had been on the point of saying, and understanding far better than even Pamela did how his fastidious refinement, natural and inherited, must be jarred upon by his future relation's vulgarity and ostentation, went on quietly:

"I do not mind it. I stay because of Pamela. She is as sweet-hearted as she is lovely."

"Yes," he said, his eyes still dark with the perplexity of finding her here. "I say," he said, with a sudden laugh, "do you ever remember the old days and want to 'go a-visitin' back to Grigsby's station'? I do sometimes. By George! How queer and odd it all seemed!" with another laugh, which had a note of bitterness in it. "It was quite a time before I got used to having my boots cleaned for me, and when I see the girls riding in the Park or taking the fences across country, I remember how you and I used to ride through the red woods, and how sweetly the pines used to smell. And do you remember the azalea bush just at the back of the store, and the sleighing in winter, and—"

He stopped short, drawing himself up stiffly and biting his lips under his fair moustache.

"Yes; I remember it all," she said steadily.

The short autumn afternoon was closing in; the golden lights had faded, and white, fairy-like mists were beginning to rise from the gardens that had once been deep moats, and crept like pale ghosts of those old dead days about the trees and bushes, as if they had stolen back to look once more on the grim and frowning walls

which had once shut in the quaint, beautiful town; but which to-day were so covered by creepers and ivy, so garlanded with flowers, so picturesquely broken by the houses that had been built into their frowning grey strength, that a writer who loved it has said that Dinan was like a young girl trying on a suit of old armour over her ball-dress.

Prue stopped as she spoke and looked about her.

There was not a soul in sight for the moment. There was no sound save the distant voices of some children in the dusky valley below, and the stir of the wind as it rustled the yellowing leaves of the trees overhead and sent them drifting earthwards.

"How chilly it is growing!" she said, with a little shiver. "It is time I took John Jeremiah in. He has a bad cold already."

But John Jeremiah's cold did not rouse any interest or anxiety in the heart of Acres. He stood, pulling restlessly at the leaves of one of the shrubs that fringed the old fosse, looking down into her pale face with contracted brows, and as he looked the spell of her presence fell on him again, and he forgot everything except that she was to him the sweetest woman his heart had ever known. He had striven hard to forget her; but as Pamela had said, she was one of those women whom no man, having loved, could ever forget. Though the old bright prettiness had faded, the grey, black-fringed eyes were the same, and if the lips had paled a little, the sweet loveableness was still there, and their gravity suddenly stirred him as even their mocking, mischievous laughter had never done.

"Prue," he said sharply, "why did you never answer my letter? Ah, heavens! How I waited, day after day, month after month! And—I had been such a fool. I had actually dared to hope when I left America that I might win you for my wife. But I think you might have sent me a line, just one line to say you were sorry. It would not have made it any easier to bear, perhaps, but it would have been a little less rough on me. And I loved you so!" under his breath.

"What letter, Cyril?" She did not know that she was using the old familiar name. "I never had any letter," going on in a still, dull tone, as she suddenly knew perfectly well what had been. "I thought you had gone away and forgotten, that was all."

There was a dead pause. Only the wind rustled a little louder and more fretfully in the trees overhead, and one of the yellowing leaves fluttered down on to Prue's shoulder.

"You never got my letter asking you to be my wife? And it did not come back, so I thought you had received it. And then I met John Grey in London one day, and he told me you were engaged to that Hill fellow, whom I always used to hate."

"I never had a letter, and it was all a—"

"Lie! Curse him! Grey had sworn to be even with me, because of that row we had about the tenderfoot he was awindling. Prue! Prue! Oh! And I still love you, Prue!" as he read something in her face that made it as pale as the ghostly mists stealing about them. "And you did care for me after all, my darling!"

Her hands went out to his, then fell to her side as she remembered.

"Pamela!" she cried. "Oh, how could we forget Pamela?"

#### CHAPTER III.

"An' so I didn't jump out on them an' frighten them. I thought most likely she'd feel mad. An' she did cry so. An' she told him to go right away, an' she hoped you and he would be very happy. An' I was glad when they'd finished, for I was gettin' the cramp scrunched up there, an' wanted to sneeze. An' I guess, way they talked, they thought a mighty lot of you, an' his voice was drefful sad, an' I guess they felt sick enough, so I let them go away without knowin' I was there." John Jeremiah the same evening was telling Pamela what he had overheard that afternoon on the boulevards, where he had hidden among the shrubs, intending to pounce out upon Prue and frighten her.

"I guess she felt real sick," went on John Jeremiah again, while Pamela, leaning in her usual indolent pose against the window, gazed out on to the Place below. There was no golden light now. It was dark with the early autumn night, through which gleamed, here and there, the scattered lights of houses and streets. But people were still passing to and fro, and the sound of voices came up from the verandah below. A girl's laugh rang out suddenly, and Pamela wondered if she had a lover.



"An' Miss Jardine's going away to-morrow. She said she should. She's going to tell ma she is obliged to go back to England. I guess I'd like to tell her that that's a big cram."

"No, you won't," said his sister, turning slowly round to face him. "If you promise not to say a word to a soul about what you heard this afternoon, and never say a word, whatever happens, I'll give you the biggest toy ship that was ever made. I'll get it built for you by a real shipbuilder on the Clyde when we get round there."

John Jeremiah's eyes kindled. The one region where he might be said to approach that state of virtue in which good little boys ought to live, and which, therefore, was wide enough to contain his restless, ambitious soul, was an ocean. He was bent on becoming a sailor.

Then the eager light faded.

"I guess I'll want to talk about it to some one," he said, in a depressed tone. "I'll be lettin' it out; because there are a lot of things I should want to know: Why she cried so, and why the letter he mailed never went, an' who John Grey was, an' why they both seemed so sorry for you; as if he couldn't love you both——"

"I'll tell you what it is, John Jeremiah," she interrupted him suddenly, "you can just come and talk to me about it, and we'll try and invent answers ourselves to the questions you ask; only you mustn't ask me too many, nor want to talk too much about it all," with a queer little smile that was rather a quiver of the lips than a laugh. The bargain was made, and John Jeremiah gave his promise. He had a way of keeping a promise when, by dint of coaxing or bribing, he was persuaded to make one.

Early next morning, much to Mrs. J. J. Spragge's indignation, Prue left Dinan, urgent necessity recalling her to England, she said. It was Pamela who, in her calm way, smoothed down her mother's ruffled feelings and nipped in the bud an inclination of that good lady to refuse to let her go, so astonished she was at her inconsiderate conduct towards the "poor darling John Jeremiah."

That young man, before whom his mother discussed most of the affairs of their daily life, sat listening with tightly shut mouth and eyes bright with such a keen desire to relieve himself of the secret weighing on him, that Pamela took him out of the room to save him from the strain.

"I say, Pam," he said, when out of hearing, "what makes you want her to go so?—an' I didn't say a word, though I wanted to badly. Do you want her to go away so that Cyril shan't have you both to love? You're real greedy. I don't mind you loving him as well as me."

"You silly little goose!" exclaimed his sister rather sharply. But she put her arm round his shoulders as if her heart felt suddenly a comfort in the undivided affection of even this reprobate young brother of hers. "Don't talk about things you don't understand. When you grow up I guess you'll find your life only big enough to hold one girl. They take an awful lot of room—they don't like to be cramped; it is like living in a house with some of the rooms shut up and locked; they always want to go into those, you see."

"Girls are mighty curious," said John Jeremiah, "always wantin' to know things, and poke into every place, and always askin' questions. Say, Pam, do you think Cyril will be sorry Prue Jardine is going?"

"Don't worry so, John Jeremiah," with an unusual energy and anger in her languid tones, and she put him out of her room.

She saw Prue before she went. She read something in Prue's eyes as she said good-bye, John Jeremiah having given her the clue. And the grey pitying eyes, dark with the pathos of the two girls' lives, made the breath catch in her own throat. Then she bent forward and kissed her.

"It's a pity you've got to go," she said in her matter-of-fact tones; "and I expect once you get away from John Jeremiah you won't feel called upon to come back to us."

About half an hour before déjeuner Acres was strolling up the Rue du Jerzual, that wonderful old French street, with its picturesque houses, a street which stands out like some painted page from the book of the past, with all its anomaly of modern noises and dirt and evil smells. Acres glanced listlessly about him as he climbed its steepness. But he stood looking at a slender and stately figure which had just turned into the street a little way above him, and was now moving down towards him with graceful, leisurely steps, daintily gloved and shod, with the prettiest and most becoming of Paris hats, and betraying at every point of her perfect morning toilette the "smart" and

fashionable millionaire's daughter. It was Pamela. For one second he hesitated, a stifled exclamation, like a faint groan, on his lips. Then he recovered himself and went forward to meet her, with the simple chivalry of his own heart to guide him, and the memory of the tearful pleading in Prue's eyes, as she begged him not to forget Pamela, to strengthen him.

She smiled as he approached her. He could not smile in response, but he greeted her with a gentle tenderness that made her look away for a second.

"I'm glad I met you," she said as they walked on together; "I have something to say to you, and as it has to be said, I think the sooner it is done the better. I hope you won't think I am behaving badly to you, but—I don't feel somehow as if I could carry this engagement of ours through. Perhaps I was ambitious. You know," she laughed, but if the sound was a little bitter, he was too overwhelmed to hear it, "they say we Americans always want titles to wear—perhaps—anyway, if you don't mind, I would rather—" She glanced up at him calm and smiling. "Well, I guess I'd rather marry some one else than you—if you don't mind."

"And you will not be 'my lady' after all!" exclaimed her mother in bitter disappointment, when a few hours later she heard that the engagement between her daughter and Lord Acres was broken off.

"No, ma; I think I would rather be 'your serene highness.' I shall marry a prince."

And only John Jeremiah noticed that her eyelids were a little red when she came downstairs next morning; and as his shrewd little precocious brain put various odds and ends of facts together, he thought, as he offered her, in an attack of mute sympathy, a warm squashed peach which he had been carrying about in his trousers pocket since daybreak, that girls were the queerest things in the world.

Three months later Mrs. J. J. Spragge saw in an English paper the announcement of the marriage of Prue to Lord Acres.

"I wouldn't have married him if he would have made me a queen!" said Pamela, with a sudden strange passion.

#### A MAID OF THE PEAK.

ON a mountain road, in the Peak District that leads from a secluded valley among the hills to a neighbouring dale, stands,

plain and stern, close to the road but backed by a grove of wispy-looking fir-trees, an old stone house known as Garforth Fold. It is not much superior to an ordinary farmhouse, but it has certain features of distinction—in a porch of some architectural pretension, and a date and heraldic device in stone over the doorway. But whatever claims the Garforths might have had to consider themselves as country gentry, they had been content for several generations to abandon the position. They had loved drinking, gambling, horse-racing more than any social distinction; but instead of ruining themselves by dissipation, the Garforths had rather thriven upon it. One of them had actually won money on the turf, and had built a cotton mill with his winnings. The last Squire Garforth had been a patron of pugilists, had even fought himself and vanquished a professional champion, had owned race-horses and trained them, and if other people lost money over them, he generally managed to be on the right side. And he had captured and married a pretty little delicate woman, and had brought her to his den among the hills, and there she had pined away and died, leaving a son, Reuben, and a daughter, Constance, both of whom inherited rather her sensitive, delicate nature than the rough, granitic character of their father.

With such surroundings, Reuben had been led into evil courses from his youth up. He had many amiable qualities, which only made him the easier prey of the unscrupulous people about him. His father's death had left him in command of a considerable sum of money, as well as the possessor of a small landed estate, and he had quickly squandered the former and deeply encumbered the latter parts of his heritage. Constance had only inherited a thousand pounds. But Reuben, as long as his money lasted, had shown himself a generous and affectionate brother. He had provided for all the expenses of her education, and the presents he had made her in clothing and jewellery were numerous and valuable. Yet he left her to herself week after week and month after month, while he went from one race-meeting to another, or passed the time with bachelor friends, among whom baccarat was the favourite diversion, and who spent their time in little else than giving or taking odds, not only on race-horses, but on the most trivial occurrences of everyday life. Left to herself, with only old Judith, the

sometime nurse, to look after her, Constance might from sheer ennui have been driven into unfitting companionship; but she had a happy disposition, which did not require any exciting nourishment. She loved flowers, music, and birds, and then she had as neighbours two nice friendly old maids, very bright and cheerful in disposition, although growing old; and at the pretty cottage of the Misses Jackson Constance was always a welcome guest. And there was a pleasant excitement in these visits, for the old ladies had a plentiful supply of nephews, bright, handsome youths, generally on some scheme of pleasure bent, and eager to have Constance as a companion. And there was an elder nephew, Arthur Jackson, strong, good-looking, and amiable, between whom and Constance there was a strong mutual tenderness.

The Jacksons had been for several generations proprietors of a huge cotton mill which occupied a pleasant valley some miles distant. It had produced a good deal of wealth in its time. Little colonies of Jacksons, pleasantly settled here and there in wealth and comfort, might have looked back to the old mill as their alma mater. But now, like some tired old horse, it seemed as if it were no longer equal to the burden it had to bear. The spindles no longer spun gold, and silks, and jewels; it was enough if they furnished household loaves and dairy butter. The young people, gay and careless, felt none of the strain of altered times; but the father was a grave and careworn man, and a shadow of care and responsibility had fallen upon the bright, handsome face of the eldest son, Arthur.

Time had mellowed the old mill, which had even an impressive appearance seen from one end of the lake or big reservoir, the latter well covered with lilies and water-plants, and swarming with pretty goldfish. And ivy and creepers had grown over the old mill, and trees had sprung up around it, and without any definite boundary there stretched beyond the pleasant but roughly kept grounds of Colworth Hall, where the Jacksons lived.

"The girl is all very well herself," said the elder Jackson one day, in a conference with his son Arthur; "but there is the brother."

"Well, it isn't Reuben I want to marry," said Arthur lightly. "Poor Reuben, he is not a bad fellow after all."

"Well, he's a very undesirable con-

nexion, anyhow," said Mr. Jackson judicially; "a connexion that might undermine the credit of a stronger firm than ours."

There was some force in this consideration, Arthur was compelled to acknowledge; so much, indeed, that the young man prudently resolved to go no more the way towards his aunt's, at Topping Edge. And he kept this resolution very firmly for some time, listening with eager ears, however, to accounts of his brothers' expeditions here and there, and how Connie did this and the other, and not angry, indeed, when a battle royal occurred between two of the younger ones, aged ten and twelve, as to which was to marry Connie in future years. But it was quite otherwise when one day the lads came down from the Edge with an account of a dull day among the hills, Connie being absent, having sent a message that she was not well enough to join the party; and at this Arthur was struck with something like remorse. Had he behaved heartlessly in staying away without a word of explanation, and was poor Connie suffering, as he was, from an aching heart? Well, he would see her once more, anyhow, and so took horse and rode away up to the hills.

"Eh, but you're a stranger quite, Master Arthur," said old Judith, as she opened the door, "and Miss Connie has been but poorly; but she'll be right glad to see you, sir."

Pale and interesting was Constance, with a grey shawl wrapped about her shoulders, and shivering a little, partly from chilliness, but more from the glad excitement of the visit. There was no mistaking the light that shone from Connie's eyes as she put her hand half timidly into Arthur's.

"I have been so uneasy about you," said the latter, a little troubled too. "I could not help riding over to see you."

"How kind of you!" murmured Connie gratefully.

"Oh, Connie," broke forth Arthur, still retaining the hand she had given him, "I have been trying to live without seeing you, but I found it impossible."

"Really and truly?" asked Connie with shining eyes.

"But it was father's fault," said Arthur awkwardly, and Connie's face clouded over, and she tried to withdraw her hand.

"Oh, darling," cried Arthur, "he does like you, and would welcome you as a daughter; but you know we are business people, and—well, you know, Connie, when

we are married it won't do for us to be much mixed up with Reuben."

This time there was no mistaking the determination with which Constance snatched her hand from Arthur's.

"You ask me to give up my brother, who has been so good to me—you, Arthur, who pretend to be fond of me, and come to see me in Reuben's house! Oh, I did not think you could be so cruel!"

Constance burst into tears, utterly discomfiting Arthur, who was prepared to argue the point, and even to make concessions. But Constance would not listen to him. In her way she was, perhaps, even more proud and obstinate than Arthur, and all his attempts to accommodate matters only ended in further estrangement.

So Arthur rode down the hills again, angry and dissatisfied, and as he passed the station on the way home he saw that the train from London had just called there and left behind it a little knot of passengers. There was a dog-cart waiting for the new arrivals, and a cart for luggage. And Reuben Garforth had just arrived with two or three friends, among whom was a lady of very striking appearance, with everything about her of the newest fashion, to whom Reuben was most devotedly attentive. As for the men, they were rather loud and "horsey" in manner, Arthur thought, and on decidedly good terms with the lady, whom one called "Loo" and the other "Sis." They were not the people he should choose to associate with his Constance; but, there, he had now no right to interfere. Evidently these people had come down for the "twelfth," now close at hand. For whatever Reuben's embarrassments might be, which were pretty well known by his neighbours, he still had his grouse moors, which were of considerable extent, and fairly stocked.

Reuben caught sight of Arthur, stopped him by a gesture, and came forward with a friendly greeting.

"Seen Constance lately?" he asked lightly, yet with meaning.

"I have just come from the Fold," replied Arthur. "She did not say she expected you."

"Nor does she," replied Reuben. "These are my friends, not hers," with an expressive shrug. "We are going to the old shooting house to rough it. Mrs. Seltzer keeps house for us; we have got a capital old cook, and I dare say we shall be very jolly."

"I dare say you will," said Arthur drily, as he rode off.

Poor Reuben! he had still some tender feeling for his sister, but how reckless and inconsistent was his conduct!

As soon as Reuben had packed off his friends, with gun-cases, and baggage, and all belongings, he started himself to walk to the Fold. It was only a three miles' walk, but every step of it was uphill; and Reuben, who in former days would have thought nothing of it, now felt almost exhausted as he reached the top of the hill. The sun had set, and the moon, full-orbed, rose in yellow splendour over the mountain brow, and gleamed upon the old home that by this uncertain light was softened into an object of tender picturesqueness. Dogs barked as he approached the door of his home, but their barking was changed to a joyous whining as he turned the handle and walked in. The whole house was silent and unlighted, and passing through the hall into the old oak parlour the moon shone through the diamond-paned window upon the golden locks of poor Constance, as she sat by the window, her head pillowed on her arms, in an attitude of deep dejection. But she sprang to her feet with a cry of joy as she heard her brother's voice.

"Why, what is the matter, pet?" said Reuben, fondling his sister's tresses as they lay scattered over his shoulder. "Who has been making you cry, dear? I say," he went on fiercely, "is it Arthur? He said he had just seen you. Has he said anything to hurt you?"

"As if I cared!" said Connie, drawing herself up proudly.

Reuben drew from her by degrees the facts of the case—how Arthur wanted to marry her, but the intolerable condition that he proposed.

"They are grandly right, those Jacksons," said Reuben. "I am not a desirable connexion. You should make it up with Arthur without thinking about me, for I am going to perdition as fast as I can."

"Then we will go to perdition together," said Constance, clinging to his arm.

"No, no," replied Reuben, "that is a journey one must take alone. And, Connie, I have been a greater rogue and scoundrel than my worst enemy would believe."

Reuben went on to say how he had had a terribly bad week at Goodwood, losing five hundred pounds in one way or another, and, afraid to face the disgrace of being a defaulter, he had gone to a money-lender



of his acquaintance, who undertook to advance sufficient to save Reuben's reputation on his getting a substantial friend to join with him in a bill. Substantial friends who are ready to join in bills for another's benefit are rare, and as the world grows older tend to become rarer than ever. In the emergency Reuben wrote the name of Arthur Jackson without any authority for doing so. In other words, he forged his friend's name.

The truth was worse than anything Constance had imagined. Ruin in its ordinary forms was nothing to such deep disgrace as this, and accompanied by such humiliation. The disgrace must be averted at all hazards.

"Reuben," said Constance, "I have a thousand pounds. You must take that and get back that terrible paper. Then we will sell all we have and emigrate to some country where we can earn an honest living together."

"You are a dear, good girl to think of such a sacrifice," said Reuben. "But luckily it is out of your power. Your money is in the hands of Crook, the banker, as trustee, and no one can touch it, not even you yourself, till you are of age."

"But if I went to Mr. Crook and begged and implored him?"

Reuben smiled.

"You would melt a heart of stone, no doubt, but you would not melt a guinea out of Mr. Crook. Leave me to my fate, dear; it won't be as bad as you think. Anyhow, I shall have a good fortnight's shooting before black night comes on."

And then he kissed her, said good-bye, and loosed his dogs, whistling them after him as he strode over the moor towards the old shooting house.

But Constance was resolved that her brother should not perish. Next morning she rode over to the town and saw her trustee, Mr. Crook, who kindly but decidedly refused to anticipate the payment of her father's legacy. He showed her a copy of her father's will, by which the sum of a thousand pounds was bequeathed to her, payable to her on the day she attained the age of twenty-one years, or on the day of her marriage, whichever should first occur.

"Then if I were married you would have to pay me, Mr. Crook?" said Constance.

"And with great pleasure," replied Mr. Crook. "That is, if the gentleman were worthy of my old friend's daughter."

Reuben had fully determined that his friends at the shooting house should not make his sister's acquaintance. But they knew that he had a place in the neighbourhood, and had their own reasons for being a little curious as to his belongings. And at the end of the first day's shooting Captain Gage complained of a sprained ankle, and left it to Major Soane to accompany his host on the following day. But the Captain found that a little exercise would be of benefit for his sprain, and in the course of the day he found his way to Garforth Fold.

Constance received him gladly. He had brought some trifling message, invented at the moment, from her brother; and he spoke in such a pleasant, sympathetic way that he won the girl's confidence at once.

To hear the Captain's lamb-like utterances you would have thought him one of Reuben's soberest friends and best advisers. He lamented his devotion to racing and gambling; and he feared that poor Reuben had got into serious trouble. Would that he could help him. But what could a poor devil of a Captain on half-pay do for a friend, with an income that just paid his club subscription, his garret in Jermyn Street, and his railway fares to friends' houses? As for tips to servants, he had to borrow the money from his hosts.

The Captain's jolly laugh and frank manners quite won upon poor Constance. Here was a man, surely, whom she could trust, and one who loved her brother, and would do anything to serve him. And she opened her heart to him.

Reuben, she said, was in bitter need of a thousand pounds, which must be raised by a certain day. Could Captain Gage suggest any means by which the money could be raised?

The Captain shook his head hopelessly.

"Then listen to my plan," said Constance. She told the Captain of the thousand pounds in the bank, which could only be released on her coming of age or on her wedding day. "Now, we must devise a plan," said Constance, fearless in her ignorance and innocence, "of a merely colourable marriage. I have read of such things," continued Constance. "Some old pensioner who, for a handsome present, would go before the registrar. Oh, there would be no religious ceremony, and so nothing really wicked."

"I'm afraid the old pensioner would

prove very troublesome," said Captain Gage, shaking his head wisely.

No, the plan was a good one, but it would be better for all parties that it should be carried out among friends, and in a confidential way. Now, if he might with all humility, he would suggest himself as the right kind of dummy to occupy the position of Miss Garforth's ostensible partner.

Constance was a little frightened now, but she remembered what was at stake, and took courage.

"It is very kind of you to make the offer," she said, "but would it be right in me to accept it? I don't know the law, but I am afraid it would prevent your really marrying anybody else."

"The same consideration applies to you," said the Captain gravely.

"Yes, but I shall never want to marry—now," said Constance with a sigh.

"I am in precisely the same position. My heart is widowed," said the Captain solemnly.

But he did not insist further in the matter. Probably when Miss Garforth had thought the thing over some better way might occur to her; but if she wanted his help, she had only to send him a message, and he would arrange everything as she wished.

Alas, no "better way" presented itself to poor Constance, and her innocent plot proceeded to its bitter end. Captain Gage was ready-witted and experienced, and all the arrangements ran without a hitch. Constance, in a plain, homespun skirt and jacket, presented herself at the registrar's office, the binding words were muttered, and the certificate of marriage obtained. The next visit was to the banker. All Constance's papers were in order; Captain Gage was in evidence; there was no reasonable ground for delaying payment. The money was handed over in a roll of notes to Constance, who joyfully clutched them, thinking of the delight of saving Reuben and preserving the family honour.

Fervent were her expressions of gratitude to Captain Gage, who, rather to her embarrassment, accompanied her on the way towards home. It was only a proper attention on his part, but she would gladly have dispensed with it. But as they approached the Fold Constance saw, standing in the road before the house, a carriage and pair with postillion, such a novel sight just then that she exclaimed: "I wonder who has come now!"

"That," said Captain Gage gravely, "is for the beginning of our honeymoon journey." Did Miss Garforth think that such charms as hers were to be resisted by mortal man? They had taken each other for better and for worse, and poor as were his own pretensions, she would find him a devoted, an adoring husband. Much more he had to say in the same strain, to which Constance listened in indignant silence. But when he went on to say that he would not allow her to squander her little fortune in trying to rescue a disgraced spendthrift from his proper doom, and that the money would give them both a gay and happy time abroad till his own remittances fell in, Constance told him in a low, cold voice that he was a scoundrel, and she had rather die than live with him.

"But you won't have the choice, my dear," said the Captain with bitter suavity. "There is no one here to help you, so jump into the carriage without making a scene or a scandal." He opened the carriage door as he seized Constance by the wrist. She screamed. The postboy looked round wonderingly, and out of the carriage stepped a tall and handsome woman, the same who at the station the other day was addressed by her companions as "Sis" or "Loo."

The effect upon Captain Gage was magical. At once, so to say, he curled up, took off his hat with a muttered apology, and made the best of his way out of sight.

"You were right, my dear," said the tall woman, taking Constance by the hand. "He is a scoundrel, although he is my husband. And he has pillaged your poor brother pretty well—that I have nothing to say to; but when it comes to ruining and plundering a sweet, innocent little girl like you it is another matter. No, I'll not come into your house. I can say what I want out here. But first take this." Mrs. Gage drew from a handsome pouch a little strip of blue paper which she handed to Constance. "I got it out of his desk last night. It's the bill your brother was so uneasy about. No, there's nothing to pay for it, dear," as Constance was about to resort to her roll of notes. "They've had enough out of him already. Keep your little fortune tight, my dear, and give me a kiss if you will; and if you ever hear of Louisa Gage, think a bit kindly of her for the good turn she has done you; and," in a whisper, "if ever that man troubles you, give him in charge to the police."

But in truth Captain Gage soon ceased

from troubling altogether, as he broke his neck soon after in a steeplechase. And in that way the awkward question of the validity of the queer marriage was never mooted. Reuben, warned by the frightful peril which his sister had run in trying to save him, and ashamed of having fallen a victim to notorious gamblers, took a new course, and began to retrieve his lost fortune as a dairy farmer on his own heavily burdened lands. As for Arthur, when he was told of poor Connie's trials by her brother, who was determined that her real motives should be known, in his love and pity he would have had her marry him at once, and thus silence all chattering tongues. But Constance would not hear of this, and it was only when Captain Gage's death was known that she consented to share Arthur's fortunes, and to become the admired centre of a lot of gallant young brothers who are ready to "knock anybody's head off" who says anything disagreeable about sister Connie.

### MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

#### CHAPTER I. AT UFFORD'S BAY.

UFFORD'S BAY is a small but fashionable watering-place, with a fine sea-front looking out on to the broad Atlantic. The bay itself is one of great beauty, being backed by lofty hills, which shelve down gradually to the shore, and are clothed with a rich growth of woods and shrubs. The town occupies the head of a small arm of the sea, situated between Portlington Head and Hornsea Bill, and consists mainly of a long row of modern houses, broken only by an imposing structure known as the Library and Assembly Rooms, and two rather pretentious hotels. A fine shingly beach sloped down from the parade to the water's edge, and it and the waters of the bay were plentifully besprinkled with boats of all descriptions, and beyond was the broad ocean just ruffled by a soft westerly breeze. Such was the opening scene of my story.

It had been a splendid autumn day, calm, bright, and hot—almost too hot to be enjoyable; but as the day waned a little breeze had sprung up which had greatly modified the heat of the morning.

It was a glorious evening; there was music in the air, and beauty was spread as a mantle over both sea and land; the eye, the ear, and all the more artistic perceptions of the mind were gratified. The

heavens were aglow with the soft radiance of the setting sun; the dark sea was tinted with its golden rays; the low wash of the wavelets as they broke on the shore, the soft treble of children's voices as they paddled in the rising tide, and the distant notes of a piano; all blending into one harmonious whole, filled the heart of my heroine with thanksgiving, and shed a calm, contemplative charm over the beautiful scene which spread itself out before her.

Eleanor Brinkler, though not yet five-and-twenty, was a widow, and as lovely a creature as ever the eye of man rested on. How exquisitely beautiful she looked, seated on the beach with her shapely white hands clasped before her, words would fail to portray. She was plainly and simply costumed; no ornaments detracted from her pure loveliness, a fragrant bunch of roses closed the lace frill which crossed her white throat, and a knot of the same sweet-scented flowers was stuck in her waistband.

Still, beautiful as she was, there was something in her tone and attitude that spoke of listlessness or ennui, and her graceful head was bent in a desponding curve.

She was looking back into her life, which had been an eventful one. Like most of us she had had her crosses and trials. First among them was that she did not marry her first love, a very handsome young fellow, who, having neither fortune nor position, nor any likelihood of obtaining either, was rather unceremoniously rejected by her father, a sensible, but not particularly amiable man, who, being averse to long engagements, cut the Gordian knot of the romantic attachment by taking Eleanor abroad, and eventually married her to a man who was able to make her a good and ample settlement. The lover, a briefless barrister, took his rejection so to heart, that he threw up his profession and went to America, and the last she heard of him was that he had joined an exploring party, which was about to cross the Rocky Mountains.

Eleanor was one of those happy-minded creatures who have the knack of making the best of everything. Instead, therefore, after her marriage, of making herself and her home unhappy, she did just the contrary, and, like all who work honestly and earnestly, she was not without her reward.

Her second trouble was that she had no

children, and her third that—at the end of four years, during which she had learned to love him—her husband died, leaving her his blessing and all that he possessed. This was followed by the death of her father. All these trials she bore with equanimity and fortitude. At first, like all widows, she was inconsolable, and for months she never went into society. Then when she began to recover, she felt that though it had been quite proper, and very genteel and nice, to dress in crape and hide her pretty curls in one of those goffered abominations yclept a widow's cap, yet this could not go on for ever. Everybody said she looked remarkably well in her weeds, which was not wonderful, seeing that a really pretty woman looks well in anything.

It is painful to have to confess that Eleanor Brinkler, good and beautiful as she was, was after all only a woman, having the same feelings and governed by the same passions as ordinary mortals.

For a whole year, twelve long months, she duly and truly cherished the memory of the late lamented Edward Augustus; but as time went on she began to fancy widowhood was, after all, a rather dull and monotonous life. It was all very well for a change, but it would not do for always. It was not possible for her to go on all her life loving an idea, a memory; she wanted something warmer and more tangible. She felt, as the dictionary phrased it, that she was a relict, and she did not want to be a relict any longer. There were plenty of good-looking fellows who were quite of the same opinion, and when she returned to society she had numerous suitors; but none of them were successful, and the world thought she was very fastidious. Yes, the London season was over and she was still a widow.

And now, here she was sitting on the beach at Ufford's Bay, watching the sunset, and wondering what had become of Arthur Mingay, who she now discovered was her first and also her only love.

She sat on, in a languid sort of a doze, thinking of her lost lover. Should she ever see him again? Was he alive or dead? Had he forgotten her? All these thoughts flashed through her mind in rapid succession—it was not the first time they had done so—and then her attention was attracted by the steady dip of oars, and on looking up, she saw a gentleman in a wherry, rowing leisurely towards her. There was something in his figure that

she seemed to recognise, and when he had passed, to her surprise and astonishment, she saw that it was Arthur Mingay, her quondam lover.

"That's him, that's the great actor," whispered Mrs. Burstall, the lady who was sitting beside her.

"Who did you say?" asked Eleanor.

"Cyril Thornton, the great tragedian!"

"Is that his real name?"

"I haven't the least idea. Those theatrical gentlemen so often play under assumed names."

"Just so," replied Eleanor; "and if I am not mistaken, that gentleman's legal cognomen is not Thornton."

"Perhaps not," replied Mrs. Burstall, "but it's the name entered in the hotel books."

"Is he staying at the 'Portlington,' then?"

"Yes; you will see him, no doubt, at the table d'hôte."

She sat on thinking. She should see him again; the idea set her heart beating wildly, and the hot blood rose to her cheeks.

At this moment there was a crunching among the shingle, and Captain Burstall's voice came saying:

"I say, Maud, do you know what time it is?"

"No, dear," answered his wife; "is it late?"

"Yes, past seven!"

And the two ladies rose and made their way back to the hotel.

Eleanor bestowed extra pains on her toilet that evening, and when she descended to the dining-room she was in a flutter of excitement in the expectation of seeing Arthur Mingay; but when they were seated she looked round in vain for his stalwart figure and handsome face. But she had not long to wait, and then he came in and took a vacant seat some distance from her and her party.

"There," said Mrs. Burstall, "that's him—Mr. Cyril Thornton, you know."

"Yes," responded Eleanor, "I see him."

Several times as the gentleman in question glanced across the table, their eyes met, but he made no sign of recognition. Eleanor's heart sank within her. Did he mean to ignore her? Had his passion so entirely evaporated that he could look thus coldly at her, as though she had been a perfect stranger? She was disappointed. He must have changed



sadly to have forgotten her so soon, or had he failed to recognise her? He had taken a seat by the side of a lady who was also a new-comer, and they were chatting gaily. Perhaps he was married, and she was his wife! This seemed to clear up the mystery, and she thereupon became dreadfully jealous, and told herself that the lady in question was the most hateful creature she had ever set eyes on.

#### CHAPTER II. AT A CHARITY BALL.

IN the saloon that evening the great actor was the subject of conversation, and during this Eleanor learned two things which eased her mind considerably. The one was that the lady he had been conversing with was a perfect stranger, and the other that he was unmarried. All this was very soothing to her feelings, but still that did not account for his not taking any notice of her. She sat there full of ardent expectation, hoping every moment that the door would open and she should see his beloved form on the threshold. But he came not, and on going to the window and looking out, she saw him and another gentleman leaning on the rails, smoking, and gazing out on the moonlit sea. Presently they were joined by a third man, and the trio walked off, laughing and talking gaily; and, with a pang of disappointment, she returned to her seat. The rest of the evening was spent in rapid talk till bed-time came, and then she retired to her room and put herself into the hands of her maid, who wondered what had come to her usually lively mistress, and was half afraid she had done something to offend her.

The following evening there was to be a ball at the assembly rooms, the proceeds to be divided between the infirmary and other charitable institutions of the town. Everybody was going, and Eleanor and Captain and Mrs. Burstall among the rest.

Eleanor Brinkler looked, as she swept into the ball-room in company with her two friends, superbly beautiful. Her dress was the perfection of good taste. Her luxuriant brown hair rippled about her pure child-like brow, her glorious eyes were brilliant with anticipated triumph, her cheeks were delicately flushed, and she entered the room, amid a buzz of admiration, with the composure of a queen.

Almost as soon as she had entered the master of the ceremonies came up and

asked if he should procure her a partner, and her answer being in the affirmative, he disappeared into the crowd and returned shortly with a little gentleman, whom he presented to Eleanor as the Honourable William Guilmore, and having done this, and introduced them to a set which was forming for a quadrille, he again vanished in search of more partners. After a few inane platitudes, the little gentleman branched off into nauseating compliments, fixing upon Eleanor his piercing black eyes, and noting her embarrassment with satisfaction. But as his florid flattery became more obnoxious, she drew herself away, and fixing her eyes upon him, said:

"I suppose I am not used to aristocratic society, and therefore I do not appreciate your vulgar but highly spiced compliments," and with the slightest of bows she turned and left him standing perfectly aghast with indignation.

She was making her way back to her friends when she was arrested by a lady who was staying at the same hotel, who drew her aside, saying:

"You seemed interested in Mr. Thornton last night. Would you like to be introduced to him?"

"Yes, oh, yes, certainly!" and she was dragged away through a crowd, and then her friend whispered:

"Here he is!"

Eleanor lifted up her eyes, and there before her stood Arthur Mingay. Her friend was about to introduce him, when, with a winning smile, she stepped forward, and in her clear, silvery voice said:

"I don't think we need any introduction. If I mistake not we are old acquaintances, and friends too, I hope!" and she held out her hand; then with a glance at the actor, who seemed rather taken aback, she went on: "I don't think that five years have so altered me that Mr. Thornton," and she laid great stress on the name, "will have failed to recognise in me the Eleanor Holtum of former days!"

"I really am afraid," stammered the actor, "that if I ever had the pleasure of knowing this lady, the fact has entirely passed from my memory!"

A hot blush suffused Eleanor's cheek. What did he mean? Did he intend to ignore and insult her? She was quite dumbfounded, and stood looking at him in blank astonishment.

The ball was over, and Eleanor had returned to her hotel. Exhausted with the

fatigue and excitement of the last few hours, she retired at once to her chamber, and drawing a chair to the open window, sat down to think. The grey dawn of an autumn morning was just breaking in the east. It was perfectly calm, there was not a breath of wind, not a sound was to be heard; all was hushed and tranquil.

Up to the time of her entering her chamber she had been suffering from a strange bewildering sort of surprise. The appearance of her old lover so unexpectedly had filled her heart with a wild longing which she could not suppress, and now this had all vanished. He had spurned and scorned her, and treated her as a stranger. She knew and felt that he had a right to be angry. Viewed from his point, appearances were against her. She had used him ill; she had jilted him, and had seemingly preferred a wealthy alliance to his strong and earnest love. But she felt that there was much to be said in her favour. She was very young, only eighteen, when she married. He had no income, no hope but in the chance of an uncertain profession. What could she do but sacrifice herself on the altar of filial duty? And now it was all over, and she bowed her head and wept bitterly. She did not think he could be so unforgiving!

Presently she looked up and wiped her eyes; the daylight was broadening, one by one the stars faded out, till only one, a solitary one fair and bright, shone in the western sky. All her bright dreams had vanished like the stars; only one remained—it was the star of hope. She sat watching it eagerly; the silken lashes of her soft eyes were upraised, and her sweet mouth half parted. A cool, fresh breeze came wafted across the calm, still sea; it stole into the window and fanned her cheek. A reverie of sweet thoughts and dreamy fancies crept over her, a sense of peace stole into her heart, and she sank into a gentle dozing slumber. When she awoke from this the star was gone, and instead the gorgeous tints of morning were suffusing the eastern sky.

#### CHAPTER III. ON BOARD THE "CYNTHIA."

THE following morning Mrs. Brinkler was very late to breakfast. She had had some hours' feverish sleep; but when she awoke she was in a sad and depressed state of mind. She knew that neither time nor absence had weakened her love

for Arthur Mingay. No one but herself knew how many times since her husband's death her heart had yearned to see him, and more, to hear his voice; and now that her prayer had been answered, he had turned from her and treated her as a stranger. It was very hard and cruel, but still she could not help loving him, how deeply and passionately she had never previously realised. But to see him again after his coldness on the previous evening, to see him at the table d'hôte flirting with that odious woman as he did yesterday, was more than she could endure; so she decided to pack up her traps and leave Ufford's Bay at once.

At this moment Mrs. Burstall entered the room, and after giving Eleanor a warm kiss, said:

"I have got an invitation for you if you like to accept it. Sir George and Lady Smithson have invited Charles and me to go for a cruise in their yacht, and Lady Smithson further hints that if you would care to accept it we may extend the invitation to you. What do you say?"

"That I shall be delighted!" replied Eleanor. "I'm tired of this place for one thing, and in the other I'm very fond of the sea."

"That's right, then; and now, when can you be ready?"

"In an hour!"

"No, no; there's no train to Exeter till half-past one, and it's only half an hour's ride to the station. I'll order a carriage for half-past twelve; will that suit you?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Burstall, turning back, "I forgot to tell you, Lady Smithson says you will find an old friend on board who, as well as Sir George and her, will be delighted to give you a welcome."

"An old friend! Who can it be?" questioned Mrs. Brinkler.

Mrs. Burstall shook her head. "I don't know. Haven't the slightest idea. One of your old flames, I expect!"

The sun was smiling serenely on the almost calm waters of the Solent, and the "Cynthia" lay at anchor off Cowes with her steam up. The weather was superbly fine; the sea, just ruffled into wavelets by a soft southerly breeze, was bathed in the full radiance of a meridian sun.

Eleanor and Mrs. Burstall, with her good and amiable husband, seated in a smart gig manned by four stalwart yachts-

men, were being pulled rapidly but almost noiselessly towards the yacht. As they approached her they saw Sir George and his wife and a tall gentleman standing by the gangway ready to welcome them.

"Eleanor!" whispered Mrs. Burstall, "do you see who that is? That's Mr. Thornton!"

"Good gracious!" cried her friend, "what shall I do? Can't we turn back?"

"Turn back? What for?" asked the Captain.

"Because I'd rather not go if that Mr. Thornton is on board. My chief reason for leaving Ufford's Bay was that I might not meet him again," replied Eleanor.

"Too late, my dear lady, too late," cried the Captain. "All you've got to do is to give him the cold shoulder, and I'll see that you are not annoyed."

Eleanor sprang lightly on board, and was kindly greeted by Sir George and Lady Smithson; and then Arthur Mingay stepped forward with extended hand, evidently with the same intention. But Eleanor swept past him with haughty bow, and he fell back and looked at Lady Smithson with a troubled brow. She only smiled back at him as she conducted her new guest below, and directed all things for her comfort and convenience.

Meantime, the anchor had been weighed, and the yacht was steaming away towards the Channel.

Arthur Mingay was leaning on the bulwark dazed and stupefied. What could it mean? In all these past years he had cherished the idea that, notwithstanding the adverse circumstances that had separated them, she still loved him, and now she had passed by him with an icy indifference which stung him to the quick.

Eleanor, as she sat in her cabin, knew that all this was only too true. But he had scorned her, refused to recognise her, and her pride forbade her to forgive him without apology or explanation. What was to her strange and inexplicable was his sudden change of manner. At Ufford's Bay he had started, with well-feigned surprise, when she claimed him as an old acquaintance and friend, and now, only two days after, when she stepped on board the yacht, he had extended his hand and met her with all his old eagerness. What did it mean? Were there two Arthur Mingays—the one cold and callous, and the other eager and expectant; the one staring at her with vacuous indifference, and the other gazing at her with eyes full of love

and admiration? It was a strange puzzle, and she could find no solution to it.

At this moment there came a tap at the door, and Mrs. Burstall entered with a face beaming with good-nature and excitement.

"Such a curious thing, dear," she said; "that gentleman I took for Mr. Thornton is a Mr. Arthur Mingay."

"Of course; I knew that. I told you at Ufford's Bay that Thornton was not his real name."

"I know; but this gentleman is not the one we saw at Ufford's Bay."

"Oh, that's nonsense!" said Eleanor petulantly. "Does he think he can bamboozle me in that way?"

"But Sir George says that Mr. Mingay has been on board the yacht for more than a week, and, therefore, the man we saw at Ufford's Bay must have been a different person!"

Eleanor stared at her in astonishment.

"If Sir George says that, of course it must be true," she said. "But I can hardly believe that two persons could be so exactly alike."

"Neither could I," responded Mrs. Burstall. "But now, my dear, what's to be done?"

"Well, I must explain matters to him and apologise."

"There is no need of that. He quite understands the situation." There was a pause, and then she said: "Now come on deck."

So Mrs. Brinkler put on her hat and followed her friend.

It was a splendid night; the sea, calm as a lake, was gilded by the full radiance of the moon. Swiftly and almost noiselessly the "Cynthia" steamed on through the dark waters, which sparkled in the moonlight.

Arthur Mingay and Eleanor Brinkler were reclining in two wicker chairs, talking in low, musical tones. All had been explained and all had been forgiven.

In Eleanor's eyes there flashed the light of a great happiness, and her beautiful lips curved in a victorious smile as she gazed into his handsome face.

"What are you smiling at, darling?" questioned Arthur, breaking the pause.

"I was thinking what a lucky chance it was that Lady Smithson asked me to accompany her on this cruise. Don't you think so, dear?"

"Yes, wasn't it!" and he laughed quietly.

He did not tell her that the whole thing had been arranged by him and Sir George, and that Lady Smithson had been an unconscious instrument in carrying out his scheme.

"You see, darling," she continued, "I did not know you were in England, and it might have been years before we met but for this happy accident; especially after that contretemps with Mr. Thornton at Ufford's Bay."

"Just so!" he said musingly. "It's the most curious piece of business I ever heard of. The resemblance must have been very great for three people to be taken in by it. Captain and Mrs. Burstall were quite angry when I said I had never seen them before, and had never been to Ufford's Bay. I know they thought I was telling them an abominable lie!"

"Never mind that now, dear," she said softly; "I want to forget all about it. I was so dreadfully miserable!"

"But you are not miserable now, darling?" he said.

"No, you dear old goose, not now that I have really found you!"

Arthur smiled, and bent down and kissed her.

## BY THE BANKS OF THE AVON.

### CHAPTER I.

THE autumn sunrays were falling redly on the peaked grey gables and mullioned windows of Hinton House, and on the lonely hills, clad thickly with fir and pine, that formed such a charming background to the old place, and the canal and river, the classic Avon, that ran along side by side through the romantically lovely scenery, with beech and larch and hazel-tree growing on the stony side of the cliff, which towered above the waterways, fringing its crest and standing out boldly, the delicate tracery of their foliage clearly defined against the cloudless blue sky.

Hinton House, once the Manor House and residence of the whilom lord of all the broad and fertile acres that lay around, was now, as a prospectus informed the public in general, a "Hydro," and any one suffering from gout, rheumatism, indigestion, want of sleep, debility, and kindred ailments, could be cured in this establishment by undergoing a course of hydro-pathy.

Mr. Vernon Weatherby, banker, of Lombard Street, City, and Rutland Gate,

S.W., glancing through his Bradshaw one August day saw a glowing advertisement of Hinton House. Gout had troubled him greatly all through the summer, and had indeed kept him a prisoner in town long after all his brother Midases had flitted away to Homburg, Aix, Malvern, Tunbridge Wells, and other health resorts; and as he read the glowing account of Turkish, electric, Russian, sulphur, spray, and other baths, he made up his mind to go down to Somersetshire and try their effect on his gouty toes, and the remnant of liver which a too plenteous diet and a too great liking for Comet claret and '47 port had left him.

"Daisy," he said, looking across at his fair young daughter, who divided his affections with the "ragoûts" and the Comet claret, "I shall go down to Somersetshire next week."

"Somersetshire, father?" she replied enquiringly, raising her large blue eyes, and regarding his jovial but rather too rubicund face attentively.

"Yes, to Hinton House."

"Why there?" she asked, while a curious light gleamed in her azure orbs.

"Because I think it is just the place to suit me, just the place where I shall get all the medical attendance and baths I require," he responded pompously, trying to move one swollen member and groaning horribly; "and it will be a nice quiet place for you."

"It will be exceedingly slow," she said demurely, but all the while a little smile was trying to pucker the corners of her rosy mouth.

"Slow? Good heavens! What are the young people of the present day coming to?" he ejaculated testily.

"The grave, dad," she smiled slyly.

"Nonsense, Daisy; be sensible, my dear. You can take Dot with you, and that thing you call Popplechick, and what more do you want?"

"Well, I might want something more, though I admit that Popplechick is a host in himself," and stooping, she picked up a hairy ball lying at her feet, and caressed it rather violently, whereupon the hirsute animated ball sneezed several times with extraordinary vigour.

"You'll have the scenery to look at," growled her parent, "and if you feel dull you can amuse yourself by taking a Turkish bath."

"Thank you, but I would much rather not," she retorted with a grimace. "I



don't think I want them at present," and she regarded her blooming reflection in the mirror opposite with a considerable amount of satisfaction.

"Well, it is all the same whether you do or not. I am going there and you must, too."

"Very well, dad," she acquiesced with a hypocritical sigh, for the little rogue's heart was beating high with delight. Was not Adrian Harcourt staying at Hinton House, and would it not be delightful—delightful to stay under the same roof-tree with him?

A few days later as a group of men were playing billiards in the "Hydro," one of them paused in the act of chalking his cue, and exclaimed: "By Jove! what an uncommonly pretty girl!" All the men made a simultaneous rush to the window which commanded a view of the road from the station; for a new arrival was always an object of interest, and pretty girls, like angels' visits, were few and far between at this home of hydropathy.

Adrian Harcourt lounged after the other fellows, but when his eyes fell on the trim female figure walking beside the bath-chair, in which sat a puffy, pompons old man, he too ejaculated, "By Jove!" and immediately went out into the hall, and helped Mr. Weatherby to alight, offering him his arm. As he did so the millionaire looked at him.

"Why, Harcourt, what—what the deuce are you doing here?"

"Taking my holiday, sir," replied the young man with the utmost gravity, though his eyes had interchanged one rapid, significant glance with Daisy's.

"What, in a hydro?" ejaculated his employer.

"Yes, I felt rather run down, so I thought I would come here, instead of going to Scarborough or Eastbourne, and enjoy complete rest."

"Quite right, quite right; you're sensible. Here's this giddy girl of mine objecting to quiet."

"Ah, is Miss Weatherby [with you?]" said Adrian, affecting to perceive her for the first time, and bowing stiffly.

"Yes, and I warrant she'll want to run away before to-night's over."

But Miss Daisy Weatherby did nothing of the sort. Her little world was composed of Adrian Harcourt. Where he was she was satisfied to remain; and while her father was consuming a cup of sticky oat-flour porridge and a dry biscuit, all the

supper the "resident physician" permitted his plethoric and overfed new patient to indulge in, in company with sundry other old fossils, who were afflicted with various complaints, she stole out into the lovely grounds that surrounded the house, and led by the red light of a cigar, joined her lover on the upper terrace.

There was nobody near, and the autumn night had closed in; the halt, the lame, and the blind were engaged over their cups of various "foods," and busy fighting to get the best biscuits out of the little glass dishes on the supper table; and so Adrian tossed away his cigar, and took his little love into his arms, and kissed her sweet mouth a hundred times, and held her pressed against his heart, and felt he was the happiest fellow in the whole world.

"How are things going on?" he asked after a while, when his transports of delight had subsided somewhat, and he was pacing up and down the terrace with Daisy's hand tucked under his arm and her head resting against his shoulder, as though it was the most natural thing in the world for it to rest there.

"Not very well," she said, a little sadly. "Dad doesn't alter his opinions easily, you know."

"I know; and he still wants you to marry a baronet?"

"It's a duke now," she rejoined, "and that's better, don't you see. Because dukes are much rarer animals than baronets, and he'll have considerable difficulty in finding a suitable possessor of strawberry leaves. Some are too young, mere babies; others are too old, hairless octogenarians, while the in-betweens are all married, so I'm safe for the present."

"He'll import a foreign one," observed the young man dolefully. "They are more plentiful abroad than here."

"I won't have a foreigner," she cried. "I won't have any one but you, Adrian; you know that."

Of course he rewarded this pretty speech with a shower of kisses, and as the bright stars twinkled in demure silence, and the moon considerably hid her light behind a gauzy cloud, it didn't much matter, and no one was any the wiser.

"I suppose there is no chance for me?"

"I am afraid not, dear," she sighed.

"If only I had a fortune! I would dare to ask for this little hand then."

"Wait till I am twenty-one," she told him soothingly; "then I shall get what my mother left me."

"You won't be twenty-one for two years yet," he objected, "and then five hundred a year will be very different from the thousands you enjoy now."

"It will make a very decent income with your salary," she told him fondly; "and what we lack in this world's goods we must make up for in love."

"My darling, you forget apparently that I am a clerk in your father's office, and that my income is dependent on his goodwill."

"Ah, so it is," with a portentous sigh.

"He could turn me adrift at a moment's notice, and, unlucky wight that I am, I have no resources—nothing to fall back upon."

"We must wait and hope," she said sadly.

"And we must not despond," he added, assuming a cheeriness he did not feel. "Fate has favoured us so far. We shall be here together for a whole month. We shall see each other every day; and that is a joy I did not dare to hope for."

"No, Adrian, we must not despond; we must be happy in the present, and hope for the future."

But as she laid her head on his breast he heard a little sob, and he knew how hard his darling felt their lot to be.

#### CHAPTER II.

THE days passed away pleasantly at the "Hydro." Mr. Weatherby was in excellent good humour. The packs, the stewings in sulphur that he got, the electric baths, the sloppy foods on which he was fed, and the general régime was conquering his enemy the gout. He was able to walk out on the lower terrace, and sit in a sheltered corner and watch the trees as they rustled their brown and amber leaves, and the Avon, as it lapped and swirled round the buttresses of the old bridge, and he talked about fishing, his favourite pastime, looking longingly at the river as it wound like a silver ribbon between emerald banks, and he would jocularly declare that soon he would be able to drill with the rest of them.

Every morning a retired sergeant of the Bombay Fencibles appeared in the large recreation room, and put through their paces the halt, the lame, and the blind. It was a performance that afforded Daisy exquisite delight. She did not drill herself, not wishing to look like a fool, but it amused her to see tottery old gentlemen trying to keep on their bulgy feet, and stout ladies of mature age, panting, puffing, and becoming crimson in the face in their desperate and ludicrous efforts to emulate

the movements of the agile drill-instructor, whirl dumb-bells, and twist about sticks.

Then there were charming excursions to be taken in various directions. Daisy often rode Dot out to one or other of the pretty villages in the neighbourhood; and as her groom was frequently in attendance on her father, pushing the bath-chair, she magnanimously dispensed with his services and went by herself, because very frequently she met a groom on foot who was much more to her liking, and who was as untiring as any steed could be, and who kept alongside Dot and talked to her in a delightful fashion.

Together the lovers went to Bath, to see those wonderful excavated baths, which are such a monument of Roman greatness, and admired the geometrical ceiling in the ladies' baths, and watched the myriads of tiny golden carp that sported in the warm water and frisked about in remains of the first century, just as though it was an ordinary, every-day pond. Then they went to Tinsley, a quaint old-world village perched on a hill on the further side of the Avon, exactly opposite the "Hydro," and were delighted with its gabled houses with their mullioned windows, and its thatched-roofed, rose-clad cottages, with the yews and hollies in their trim gardens, cut into rounds, squares, pillars, arches, cups and saucers, and all manner of queer and fantastic shapes; and they went to have tea at the queer inn, with its low-pitched, mellow-thatched roof, and its curious mounting-stone and great iron ring above attached to the wall, to which in olden days the bluff squires or sturdy Somerset farmers hitched their horses' bridles while they went within to quaff a mug of the foaming nut-brown October or a tankard of mulled claret.

Of course Daisy insisted upon hitching Dot's bridle up, and, equally of course, Adrian let her; and then they went into the dark, oak-lined best parlour, which smelt so sweetly of dried rose-leaves and lavender, and the buxom hostess brought them in a delicious tea—white home-made bread, little pats of gold-coloured butter, a piled-up dish of bloomy plums and luscious nectarines, a big jug of thick cream, and a goodly allowance of tea.

"What a charming place!" said Daisy, as she sugared Adrian's cup of tea to a nicety.

"Jolly, isn't it? I say, darling, couldn't we be happy here—in a little cottage? Love in a cottage, you know."

"Very happy," she agreed, with a blush and a smile that dimpled her pretty face bewitchingly. "Only I am afraid we never shall be happy together, Adrian."

"Why, dear, is there anything fresh?" he asked anxiously.

"The Honourable Mr. Cholmondeley Travers comes down to the 'Hydro' to-morrow," she replied dolefully.

"Well, he is not a duke."

"No, not yet; but he will be some day. He is heir to the dukedom of Primrose Hill. The present Duke has no children."

"The dickens he is! Then has your father invited him down?"

"I believe so."

"To propose to you?"

"Ye—es," she acknowledged reluctantly.

"And what are you going to do?"

"Refuse him, of course, Adrian," she cried indignantly. "How can you ask such a question?"

"Forgive me, dearest," he said very penitently, going over and kneeling beside her, and taking both her little hands in his, "but I fear to lose you. Life would be such a blank without you."

"You will not lose me, dear," she told him reassuringly, running her hand through his hair caressingly. "I will never marry any one save you."

"But I shall drag you down to poverty," he groaned, leaning his head against her shoulder.

"Better poverty with you than wealth with any other man," she replied firmly; "and, Adrian, I think it would be better to put a bold face on the matter, and to ask father to consent to our marrying on the first opportunity."

"He will be certain to refuse his consent."

"I will tell him that I will have no one else. Only think how I shall be worried by this Travers man," she went on hurriedly. "He is an impecunious scion of a noble family, and to bolster up his house he will do anything, brave anything to obtain father's money. It will be horrible. In town he haunted me like a shadow, and here it will be worse, much worse, and he will watch us, Adrian. We shall never have a moment alone together."

"Then let us make the most of this," he said, fondly winding his arm around her little waist, "and I'll ask your father on the very first opportunity."

The next day the Honourable Cholmondeley arrived, and immediately attached himself to Miss Weatherby in a

most marked manner, keeping every one else away, to her utter and intense disgust.

She had gauged the man's character, and knew he was a coward, so when she rode out and he came to accompany her, she would give Dot's mouth a sharp pull with the curb, and the little animal, unused to such treatment, would kick and rear, whereupon Mr. Travers would make himself scarce, giving Dot's iron-shod heels a wide berth.

Daisy adopted this plan on the day several of the folk from the "Hydro" drove over to see Farleigh Castle. Adrian and some other men had announced their intention of walking, so Travers said he would walk too, and set out beside Miss Weatherby; but her mount instantly became so obstreperous and kicked so furiously that he retired immediately to a vacant place in one of the carriages, leaving the coast clear for Adrian, who walked every inch of the way beside Dot without the animal showing the slightest sign of disapproval.

The ruins of Farleigh Castle looked most picturesque, standing there grim and grey, bathed in the autumn sunshine, on the slope of a hill embowered with trees. Only the shell of a gateway remained, and above it was the crest of the Hungerfords sculptured in stone—a wheatsheaf between two sickles. Portions of the south-west and south-east towers remained with walls of a thickness of eight feet, with narrow windows and embrasures, and part of a wall looking over a deep dell, shaded by a thick, leafy wood called "Dane's Ditch." Little else remained save the chapel, which was in a good state of preservation. They went down a small flight of steps to get to the entrance, and when the door was opened and they stepped into the dimly-lighted edifices, it was as though they had stepped back into the middle ages. The time-worn walls were hung with back and breast plates—dinted and marked from many a furious fray—with swords, and spears, and halberds, and morions, and helmets, and a variety of other deadly weapons and historic curiosities, relics of that time when Colonel Hungerford held the castle for his luckless master, Charles the First, against the iron usurper.

Of course they went and looked at the monuments, taking especial notice of the magnificent one of black and white marble to Sir Edward Hungerford and his wife, Margaret, and they went to the crypt

under the chantry chapel, and saw the leaden coffins containing the embalmed bodies of long dead and bygone Hungerfords tapering from the shoulders to the feet, with the features of a face in strong relief, seen plainly—for the wooden coffin in which they had been encased protected them for many years, until the damp of that underground vault rotted them, and they fell to pieces.

Daisy was glad to get out once more into the fresh air and glow and brilliance of the September day, and she enjoyed her homeward ride immensely, for by a little manœuvring the lovers managed to drop behind the others, and interchange some of those pretty speeches, those soft nothings so dear to young people as they went slowly through the lovely scenery.

"I am going to 'put it to the touch' to-morrow, darling," said Adrian, as he lifted her off her horse at the door of the "Hydro," Travers looking on with envious eyes, but not daring to approach Dot.

"Heaven send you good luck, dear love," she murmured back, "and grant us our happiness."

The next morning, as Mr. Weatherby was going down to the river—for he had so far recovered as to be able to hobble down to the Avon and throw a fly now and again—Adrian joined him, looking horribly confused and nervous, and when they were nearing the bridge he broached the subject next his heart, and in a manly, straightforward fashion asked the old gentleman for his daughter's hand.

Now Mr. Weatherby, though a banker, was a man with a pedigree as long as a mandarin's pigtail and as complicated as a Chinese puzzle, and his pet prejudice was "blood and breeding." Harcourt was a young man of fairly good family, but nothing out of the common, so the banker turned upon his clerk with a furious frown.

"No, young man; a thousand times no! I won't hear of it. I mean Daisy to marry a duke. So never speak to me on the subject again."

Then he turned his back on the unfortunate young man and began to busy himself with his fishing tackle. Adrian stood as though turned to stone, until the approach of Travers made him move off a

little; but he did not go very far. He sat down and stared blankly at the river. His life seemed to have come to an abrupt end, and he took heed of nothing until a loud splash and a cry for help attracted his notice, and he saw Mr. Weatherby's bald head bobbing up and down like a cork on the glittering waters. He realised in a moment that this ardent disciple of Isaac Walton had leant forward too far in his zeal to catch a member of the Avon's finny tribe, overbalanced, and slipped in.

Travers, who had been standing at his elbow, made no attempt to save his would-be father-in-law, only danced about the bank shouting frantically for help.

Adrian, on the other hand, kicked off his boots, divested himself of his coat, and plunged in, striking out boldly for that bundle of grey cloth with a pink top-knot that was being tossed hither and thither as the rapid river bore him along.

It was a sharp struggle for the young man to land his fish, for, when he seized the drowning banker, the unfortunate old gentleman held on to him with such grim tenacity that it threatened the destruction of both. To avoid so unpleasant a catastrophe, Adrian was under the painful necessity of ducking his employer's head two or three times, and then, having by this means rendered him docile, he slowly toiled ashore with him, and Travers's wild yells having attracted a little crowd, Mr. Weatherby was carried up to the "Hydro" and soon brought round between hot blankets and other life-restoring appliances.

"Where is he?" muttered the old man feebly, as soon as he opened his eyes.

"I am here, sir," replied Adrian, stepping up to the side of his couch.

"You shall have her, my boy. You are worthy of her. I like a fellow to be a man. Here, take her."

And the banker put his daughter's hand in that of her lover, while Travers looked on and gnawed his lips in silent and impotent fury to think what he had lost by his cowardice.

As to Adrian Harcourt, he never regretted having chosen for his wife the woman whom he won by the banks of the Avon.

#### ADVERTISEMENT DEPARTMENT.

For particulars respecting Advertisement Spaces, address THE ADVERTISING MANAGER of "All the Year Round," No. 168, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

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## TABLE OF EVENTS, 1891-1892.

## SEPTEMBER, 1891.

- 3.—The German Emperor and King of Saxony visited the Emperor Francis Joseph at Horn, and witnessed the Austrian Autumn Manœuvres.
- 4.—The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company arrived at Balmoral and performed "The Mikado" before the Queen and Court.
- 7.—Meeting of Trades' Union Congress at Newcastle under presidency of Mr. Burt, M.P.
- 8.—At Doncaster, the Champion Stakes for two-year-olds won by La Flèche.  
National Temperance Choral Fête at Crystal Palace, 4,000 choristers from various places in England and Wales taking part.
- 9.—The St. Leger, for which nine competed, gained by Sir F. Johnstone's Common, the Two Thousand Guineas and Derby winner, after a splendid race with M. Blanc's Révérend and Colonel North's St. Simon of the Rock, who were second and third.  
Death of M. Jules Grévy, ex-President of the French Republic, aged 78.
- 10.—Common, winner of St. Leger, sold to Mr. Blundell Maple for £15,000.  
By collision in the Mediterranean between the Italian steamer "Taormina" and Greek steamer "Thessalia," the former was sunk, and a hundred persons perished.  
Extensive and most calamitous floods in Spain, causing loss of life computed at over 3,000 souls and destruction of property to an enormous amount; the catastrophe being described as unparalleled in the annals of the country.
- 16.—Cricket season concluded by match at Hastings between Gentlemen and Players; won by latter by an innings and one hundred and twenty-eight runs.
- 19.—Twenty thousand French working men, who had journeyed to Rome to pay homage to the Pope, received in the Basilica of St. Peter's by His Holiness, who made them an impressive address.  
Suicide at Santiago of Balmaceda, the deposed President of the Chilean Republic.
- 21.—Fiftieth anniversary of the opening of London and Brighton Railway.  
Sir James Ferguson, M.P., appointed Postmaster-General in succession to the late Mr. Raikes.
- 23.—At Leicester, the Royal Handicap, value £6,000, gained by Rusticus, beating Victorious, Enniskillen, and nine others.
- 26.—Lancashire Plate won by Signorina, beating Orme and seven others.
- 29.—Mr. Alderman Evans elected Lord Mayor for ensuing civic year.  
Mass celebrated by the Pope in St. Peter's, Rome, at which 25,000 foreign pilgrims were present.  
Consecration of Bishops of Truro, Lichfield, Coventry, Southwark, and Zululand, in

St. Paul's Cathedral by Archbishop of Canterbury.

- 30.—Suicide of General Boulanger at Brussels.

## OCTOBER, 1891.

- 5.—Death of Mr. Charles Stewart Parnell, ex-leader of Irish National Party, aged 45.
- 6.—To-day also occurred the death of another very prominent public man, viz., that of the Right Honourable W. H. Smith, First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons, 66 years old.  
At Stuttgart, aged 68 years, died the King of Württemberg, last of the German Sovereigns who were reigning when the Empire was proclaimed at Versailles in 1871.
- 10.—Private and unostentatious funeral of Mr. W. H. Smith, at St. Mary's, Hambleden. At the impressive memorial service in Westminster Abbey, representatives of the Queen and Royal Family, and many members of both Houses of Parliament and of the Diplomatic Body were present.
- 11.—The remains of Charles S. Parnell interred at Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, enormous crowds witnessing the funeral procession.
- 14, 15.—At Newmarket, the Cesarewitch, for which twenty-four ran, won by Ragimunde, followed home by Penelope and Lily of Lumley, all three outsiders; and the Middle Park Plate by Orme, who beat El Diablo, Gantlet, and seven others.
- 17.—Mr. A. J. Balfour appointed First Lord of the Treasury in room of Mr. W. H. Smith.
- 19.—Celebration of Centenary of Royal Veterinary College, Camden Town, at which Prince of Wales and Duke of Cambridge assisted.
- 26.—By an accident on the Lyons and Grenoble Railway fifteen persons were killed and fifty injured.
- 27.—The Strand Election resulted in return of Mr. F. Smith, son of the late Member, by majority of 3,006.  
Death at Southampton of Lieut.-Colonel W. Hewett, last of the British officers engaged at Waterloo, aged 97.
- 28.—At Newmarket, the Cambridgeshire won by Comedy, who defeated Breech, Derelict, and twenty-six others.
- 31.—Terrible and most calamitous earthquake in Japan, nearly 5,000 persons being killed, many thousands injured, and property destroyed of incalculable value.

## NOVEMBER, 1891.

- 1.—Destructive fire at Sandringham House, the Norfolk residence of Prince of Wales, the two upper floors being much damaged.
- 7.—Mr. W. L. Jackson appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland.

- 9.—Fiftieth birthday of Prince of Wales.  
Lord Mayor's Day, Lord Salisbury making the political speech usual at the banquet.  
At Sandringham, the Prince of Wales presented with solid gold cigar box, set with diamonds, a jubilee gift from the London Actors and Managers.
- 10.—Mrs. W. H. Smith gazetted to the Peerage as Viscountess Hambleden.
- 13.—Liverpool Autumn Cup won by Madame D'Albany, fourteen running.
- 25.—Sudden death in Paris of Earl of Lytton, British Ambassador to France, aged 60.
- 26.—By command of the Queen, Signor Lago's Royal Italian Opera Company gave a performance at Windsor Castle of Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" before Her Majesty and a large party of invited guests.  
Death of Dr. Goodwin, Bishop of Carlisle.
- 28.—Manchester November Handicap, for which thirteen ran, won by Lady of Lumley.

### DECEMBER, 1891.

- 4.—Death in Paris of Dom Pedro, ex-Emperor of Brazil, aged 66.
- 6.—Disastrous colliery explosion at St. Etienne, in France, by which seventy-two men lost their lives.
- 7.—Announcement of engagement of Duke of Clarence, eldest son of Prince of Wales, to Princess Victoria Mary of Teck.
- 9.—Civil Service Banquet at Hotel Métropole, presided over by Prince of Wales.
- 12.—The large steel ship "Enterkin," from Hull to Brisbane, totally wrecked near mouth of the Thames, only three men being saved out of thirty on board.
- 16.—The Inter-University Rugby football match, played at West Kensington, won by Cambridge by two tries to Oxford's nil.
- 17.—Death of Dr. Harold Browne, Bishop of Winchester, aged 80.
- 18.—The Guion steamskip "Abyssinia," from New York to Liverpool, burnt at sea, and passengers and crew saved by North German steamer "Spree."
- 21.—Death of Duke of Devonshire at Holker Hall, aged 83.
- 22.—Mr. J. S. Simonds appointed Chief Officer of Metropolitan Fire Brigade.
- 24.—Sudden death of Sir Thomas Chambers, Recorder of London, aged 77.
- 26.—Bank Holiday. The fine and mild weather which succeeded the thick fogs and intense cold of the previous week came as a boon to holiday-makers, of whom vast crowds were seen everywhere, and who crowded the theatres and music-halls to overflowing, as usual on Boxing night.  
Shocking fatality at Theatre Royal, Gateshead, where a panic from a false alarm of fire resulted in one man and nine children being killed in the rush for the exits.  
While shooting in the Royal preserves at Osborne, Prince Christian was unfortunately hit, and lost his left eye.
- 28.—Sudden death of Sir William White, British Ambassador at Constantinople.
- 31.—Destructive explosion in Dublin Castle, happily unattended with loss of life, one official, however, having a narrow escape,

as he had left the room which was wrecked just before the explosion occurred.

Death at St. James's Palace of Prince Victor of Hohenlohe, nephew of the Queen, aged 58 years. Deceased Prince was a British Admiral and a sculptor of much merit.

### JANUARY, 1892.

- 1.—British barque "Childwell" ran into and sunk off Flushing by Belgian steamer "Noordland," and fifteen of her crew lost.
- 2.—At Blackheath, the International Rugby football match between England and Wales won by former by three goals to one goal and a try.  
Death at Greenwich of Sir George Airy, formerly Astronomer Royal, aged 90.
- 4.—Duke of Devonshire unanimously elected Chancellor of Cambridge University, in succession to his father, who had filled the office for thirty years.  
Funeral of Prince Victor of Hohenlohe at Sunningdale, Berkshire, attended by Prince of Wales, other Royal Princes, and many distinguished persons.
- 6.—At Melbourne, amid great excitement and after four and a half days' play, a combined Australian eleven defeated Lord Sheffield's English cricketers by 54 runs.
- 7.—Sudden death at Cairo of Tewfik Pasha, Khedive of Egypt, in his 40th year: succeeded by his eldest son, Abbas Bey, a youth of 18 years.
- 11.—Official announcement that the Duke of Clarence, eldest son of Prince of Wales, was seriously ill at Sandringham "from a severe attack of influenza, accompanied by pneumonia."
- 12.—The ancient and historic Abbey of Fécamp, in Normandy, where the "Benedictine" liqueur is made, destroyed by fire.
- 14.—About nine o'clock this morning, at Sandringham, after an illness of only a few days, died Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, eldest son of Prince of Wales, and Heir Presumptive to the Throne. The calamitous death of this young Prince, who had just attained his 28th year, was the cause of profound grief among all classes, the greatest sympathy being everywhere felt for his Royal parents, and for the young Princess, who was so soon to have become his wife.  
On this day also, at the Archbishop's House, Westminster, died the venerable Cardinal Manning, in his 84th year, deeply and universally lamented.
- 20.—Funeral of the Duke of Clarence in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The obsequies were conducted with great pomp and full military honours, the service in the Chapel being of most impressive and solemn grandeur. The coffin was followed by the Prince of Wales, the Royal Princes, and a long and imposing procession of Royal and distinguished personages, all the Sovereigns of Europe being represented. Memorial services were held in St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, the Chapel Royal, and in the principal churches throughout the empire.

- 21.—After an impressive and solemn service at the Brompton Oratory, the remains of Cardinal Manning were interred at Kensal Green Cemetery, thousands witnessing the long funeral procession.
- 29.—Letter from the Queen to the Nation in London "Gazette," expressing her gratitude for the loyalty and affectionate sympathy evinced by her subjects in every part of the Empire "on an occasion more sad and tragical than any but one which has befallen me and mine as well as the nation."
- 30.—The great battleship "Victoria" went ashore on west coast of Greece, but was floated off only slightly damaged.
- 31.—Death at Mentone of Mr. Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher, aged 58.

### FEBRUARY, 1892.

- 1.—The North German liner "Eider" grounded on the rocks near St. Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight, in a dense fog. Passengers and crew saved by life-boats.
  - 2.—The second of the three matches between the English cricketers and representative teams of Combined Australia was played at Sydney, and resulted in another win for the Colonists by 72 runs.
  - 6.—The International Rugby football match at Manchester between England and Ireland won by former by a goal and a try to nothing; while at Swansea, Scotland defeated Wales by seven points to two.
  - 8.—Sir Charles Hall, Q.C., M.P., elected Recorder of London, in succession to Sir Thomas Chambers.
  - 9.—Reassembly of both Houses of Parliament.
  - 11.—Funeral of Mr. Spurgeon, an immense procession of mourners following the coffin to Norwood Cemetery, the place of interment.
  - 13.—Death near Chichester of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Provo Wallis, "father of the Navy," 101 years old. The veteran Admiral joined his first ship in 1804, and was second lieutenant of the "Shannon" when she won her memorable battle with the "Chesapeake" off Boston seventy-nine years ago.
  - 15.—Great Demonstration of Salvationists in Hyde Park as a welcome home to "General" Booth on his return from India and the Colonies. Perfect order prevailed throughout.
  - 20.—At Edinburgh, in the International Rugby football match between Scotland and Ireland, the Caledonians were victorious by a try to nothing.
  - 23.—In House of Commons the motion for Disestablishment of Church of England in Wales rejected by 53 votes.
  - 24.—By fall of a factory chimney at Cleckheaton, fourteen women lost their lives.
  - 25.—The Court Martial assembled at Malta to enquire into circumstances attending the grounding of the "Victoria," found the charge of negligence against Captain and Staff-Commander "partly proved," and sentenced both officers to be reprimanded, the former severely.
- For fourth year in succession Colonel North's grand old dog Fullerton won Waterloo Cup, beating all coursing records.
- 26.—Mr. de Cobain, Member for East Belfast, unanimously expelled House of Commons for having fled from justice and failed to attend in his place when so ordered.
  - 29.—The great Championship Chess Match played at Havana between Messrs. Steinitz and Tschigorin, won by former by ten games to eight, three being drawn.
- Prince of Wales re-elected Grand Master of English Freemasons for eighteenth time.

### MARCH, 1892.

- 5.—London County Council Elections, resulting in return of eighty-four Progressives and thirty-four Moderates.
- England victorious in three International football matches, defeating Scotland in the Rugby game at Edinburgh, and Ireland and Wales in games under Association rules at Belfast and Wrexham.
- 11.—Terrible fire-damp explosion in Anderlues Colliery, province of Hainault, Belgium, 153 men being destroyed.
  - 13.—Death at Darmstadt of the Grand Duke of Hesse, son-in-law of the Queen, in his 55th year.
  - 14.—Death at Pau of Viscount Hampden, who, as Mr. Brand, was Speaker of House of Commons from 1872 to 1884.
  - 15.—First meeting new London County Council, when Lord Rosebery was unanimously elected Chairman, and Messrs. J. H. Hutton and W. M. Dickenson, Vice-Chairman and Deputy-Chairman respectively.
  - 17.—Two men executed at Oxford for murder of two gamekeepers near Aylesbury.
  - 19.—Departure of Queen from Windsor for Hyères, in the south of France.
- At the Oval upwards of 32,000 persons witnessed the final for the Association Cup between the Aston Villa and West Bromwich Football Clubs, the latter gaining by three goals to nothing.
- 21.—Mr. G. W. Hastings, Member for East Worcester, who had pleaded guilty at Central Criminal Court to misappropriating Trust moneys, unanimously expelled House of Commons.
  - 23.—Lincolnshire Handicap, for which twenty-five started, won by Clarence, with Acrobat and Linkboy second and third.
  - 25.—In House of Commons Mr. French's motion in favour of payment to Members rejected by majority of 165.
- Grand National won by Father O'Flynn, who beat Cloister, Ilex, and twenty others.
- 26.—At Stamford Bridge twenty-three runners contested the Ten Miles Amateur Cup, easily won by Mr. S. Thomas, Kildare A.C., in 53 min. 26½ sec.
  - 28.—The third match of Lord Sheffield's cricketers, played at Adelaide against an Eleven of Combined Australia, resulted this time in a most decisive victory for the English players, who won by an innings and 230 runs.
  - 29.—The German liner "Eider," which had grounded near St. Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight, two months before, floated off and safely towed to Southampton.
- London County Council fixed salary of their Deputy-Chairman at £1,500.

- 30.—Dr. Vaughan, Bishop of Salford, appointed Archbishop of Westminster in succession to late Cardinal Manning.

#### APRIL, 1892.

- 2.—Leicestershire Spring Handicap won by Favonius, beating eleven others.  
International football match under Association rules between England and Scotland won by former by four goals to one.  
The Stock Exchange point-to-point Steeplechase, run near Potter's Bar, resulted in Mr. A. J. Schwabe winning prize for Light Weights and Mr. Jefferson the one for the Heavy Division.
- 6.—City and Suburban at Epsom, won by Buccaneer, beating Trapezoid, Caterina, and nineteen others.
- 8.—The Oxford and Cambridge athletic sports at West Kensington attracted largest attendance on record, and ended by Cambridge being victorious by the odd event.
- 9.—For third successive year the University Boat Race fell to Oxford, who easily won by 2½ lengths, in 19 min. 21 sec., fastest time ever made.  
The House of Commons point-to-point Steeplechase came off near Kineton, Warwickshire, the prize for Heavy Weights being taken by Mr. W. H. Long, and that for Light Weights by Mr. F. B. Mildmay.
- 16.—Easter Monday. The fine bright weather which ushered in the first Bank Holiday of the year had its usual effect of filling all places of popular resort in and round London with immense crowds of pleasure-seekers, over 75,000 visiting the Crystal Palace alone. The success of the day, however, was terribly marred by a disastrous accident at Hampstead Heath Railway Station, owing to the fearful crush on the stairs leading down to the platform, with result that two women and six lads lost their lives and several other persons were badly injured.
- 25.—Véry's restaurant in Paris, where Ravachol, the notorious anarchist, was arrested, completely destroyed by dynamite, the proprietor himself and several other persons in the place being seriously wounded. M. Véry and another of the injured men died soon after in hospital, and were accorded public funerals, at which enormous and sympathising crowds attended.
- 27.—In House of Commons a motion to extend the Parliamentary franchise to women rejected by 175 to 152.  
In Paris Ravachol and four other anarchists tried for the capital offence of having caused the recent dynamite explosions in that city, and he and one other sentenced to penal servitude for life, the jury having added "extenuating circumstances" to their verdict of guilty, for which they were loudly hooted and groaned at.
- 29.—Terribly disastrous hurricane in Island of Mauritius, described as the most fatal and calamitous event that ever occurred in the Colony, over twelve hundred persons being killed, and an immense number of others injured. The damage to houses, public buildings, and to the sugar crops

and shipping was enormous, one-third of Port Louis, the capital, being utterly destroyed, and thousands of the inhabitants rendered homeless and destitute.

- 30.—Annual Banquet of the Royal Academy.

#### MAY, 1892.

- 1.—Great and orderly demonstration of the Eight Hours Labour League in Hyde Park; half a million of people estimated present.
- 2.—Return of the Queen to Windsor, after an absence of six weeks.  
Universal Cookery and Food Exhibition at Portman Rooms opened by Lord Mayor.
- 4.—At Newmarket the Two Thousand Guineas, for which fourteen ran, won by Mr. Rose's Bonavista, Mr. H. Milner's St. Angelo being second, and Prince Soltykoff's Curio third. The favourite, Orme, on whom the odds of 2 to 1 had been laid, went seriously amiss a few days before the race, and, fully convinced that the horse had been "foully poisoned," his owner, the Duke of Westminster, offered a large reward for the discovery and conviction of the criminals.
- 5.—South Eastern Railway Station at Dover almost totally destroyed by fire.
- 6.—The One Thousand Guineas won by Baron de Hirsch's La Flèche, beating The Smew, Adoration, and four other fillies.  
Great Primrose League gathering in Covent Garden Theatre, under presidency of Marquis of Salisbury, who made a very important speech on Irish Home Rule.
- 7.—International Horticultural Exhibition at Earl's Court opened by Duke of Connaught.
- 8.—Scott's well-known Supper-Rooms in the Haymarket destroyed by fire during the night, four youths losing their lives.
- 13, 14.—At Kempton Park the Royal Two-Year-Old Plate won by Milford; and the Great "Jubilee" Stakes by Euclid, an outsider, who beat twenty others.
- 14.—Fiftieth anniversary of publication of "Illustrated London News."
- 18.—Newmarket Stakes won by Curio, after close finish with St. Angelo and Damien, twelve running.
- 20.—Mr. Deacon, an American gentleman, sentenced at Nice Assizes to a year's imprisonment for shooting a M. Abielle, whom he had found at night in his wife's apartments at an hotel in Cannes.
- 21.—Brazilian ironclad "Solimoes" foundered off the coast of Uruguay, only five men being saved out of a hundred and twenty.
- 22.—The notorious malefactor Frederick Deeming hanged at Melbourne, his latest crime being the murder of his wife there last Christmas.
- 24.—Seventy-third birthday of the Queen.  
Prince George, only surviving son of Prince of Wales, created Duke of York, Earl of Inverness, and Baron Killarney.  
In House of Commons, in fullest House of present session, the second reading of the Irish Local Government Bill carried by a large majority, the numbers being 339 to 237.



- 25.—Sudden death at Wiesbaden of Sir Charles Butt, President of Probate, Divorce, and Admiralty Court, aged 61 years.
- 26.—Celebration of Golden Wedding of King and Queen of Denmark at Copenhagen, the Emperor and Empress of Russia, King and Queen of Greece, and Prince and Princess of Wales, and their families, being among the numerous Royal and illustrious guests assembled to do honour to the occasion.
- Union Company's steamship "Scot" arrived at Southampton from Cape Town in 14 days 11½ hours, best time ever made, her speed averaging 17½ knots.
- 29.—French Derby won by Chêne Royal.
- 30.—Mr. Justice Jeune appointed President of Probate and Divorce Court.
- At the National Sporting Club, Peter Jackson, a black pugilist, defeated Frank Slavin, the Australian boxer, in glove fight, after ten rounds severe fighting.
- 31.—In House of Commons the hitherto always successful motion for an adjournment over Derby Day rejected by 158 to 144.
- Terrible fire in the Przibram Silver Mine, near Prague, Bohemia, causing the loss of nearly four hundred lives.

## JUNE, 1892.

- 1.—In splendid weather the race for the Derby, for which thirteen ran, resulted in the unexpected victory of Lord Bradford's Sir Hugo, who started at 40 to 1, the favourite, La Flèche, owned by Baron de Hirsch, being a good second, and M. Blanc's Bucentaure, against whose chance the extreme odds of 100 to 1 were laid, finishing close up.
- Termination of the great strike of Durham colliers, after lasting twelve weeks.
- 3.—The Oaks, for which only seven started, won by La Flèche by a short head from The Smew, with Lady Hermit third.
- 5.—Calamitous floods and fires in the Pittsburgh oil region, Titusville and Oil City being partially destroyed, with loss of life computed at 200 souls.
- 6.—Whit Monday. Magnificent weather favoured Bank Holiday, of which fullest advantage was taken by the thousands of holiday-makers, who crowded all places of favourite resort in or about the town, or availed themselves of river, road, or rail for a day's outing in the country.
- 7.—Arrival of the Czar at Kiel on a visit to the German Emperor.
- 10.—Manchester Cup won by Balmoral, sixteen starting.
- 11.—At Cambridge the Duke of Devonshire formally inaugurated Chancellor of the University, and conferred honorary degrees upon fifteen distinguished men, the Duke of Edinburgh being one of the number.
- 12.—Grand Prix de Paris, value £10,040, for which ten ran, gained by Ruil, with Courlis and Chêne Royal second and third. No English horses competed.
- 14.—Fatal accident on Great Eastern Railway at Bishopsgate, one workman's train dashing into another which had come to a standstill at the station, five men losing their

- lives and fifty being injured. At the inquest two signalmen were severely censured.
- 14, 17.—At Ascot the Prince of Wales's Stakes won by Martagon; Ascot Stakes by Billow; Royal Hunt Cup, for which twenty-four started, by Suspender; Gold Cup by Buccaneer, his only opponent being Ermack; Wokingham Stakes by Hildebert, in a field of twenty-two; and the rich Hardwicke Stakes by St. Damien.
- 17.—Prince George of Wales took his seat in the House of Lords as Duke of York.
- Under the presidency of Duke of Abercorn, nearly twelve thousand delegates from all parts of the province attended the Ulster Unionist Convention at Belfast to protest against Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Scheme. The utmost enthusiasm and unanimity, as well as perfect order, characterised the proceedings at this great assemblage, as also at the immense outdoor demonstration which followed.
- 18.—Seventy-seventh anniversary of Waterloo.
- 20.—Fifty-fifth anniversary of Queen's accession.

Arrival of King and Queen of Italy in Berlin on visit to German Emperor.

- 22.—Instalment at Dover of Marquis of Dufferin as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, in succession to late Right Hon. W. H. Smith.
- 23.—Great Unionist Convention in Dublin of the three southern provinces of Ireland to protest against Irish Home Rule.
- 25.—Colonel Cody's Wild West Troupe gave a performance in Windsor Home Park before the Queen and Court.
- 27.—Queen visited Aldershot, and after laying foundation stone of new Garrison Church, reviewed the troops of the Division, numbering nearly 16,000 of all arms.
- Arrival in London of King of Roumania on visit to the Queen.
- 28.—Fifty-fourth anniversary of Queen's coronation.

Dissolution of Parliament.

Resignation of Lord Rosebery of Chairmanship of London County Council.

Fatal balloon accident at Crystal Palace. The aerostat, in which were Captain Dale, his young son, and two gentlemen, after reaching a height of about 600 feet, collapsed and fell, the Captain being killed on the spot, and the others sustaining terrible injuries, one, Mr. Shadbolt, dying in hospital shortly after.

## JULY, 1892.

- 1.—The "City of Chicago" from New York to Liverpool, wrecked on Irish coast in dense fog; passengers and crew all saved.
- 2.—University Cricket Match won by Oxford.
- 4.—Lawn Tennis Championship won by Mr. Baddeley, who again beat Mr. J. Pim.
- 6.—At Lord's, Players defeated Gentlemen by an innings and 26 runs.
- Celebration of tercentenary anniversary of Dublin University.
- 7.—At Henley the Diamond Sculls gained for first time by a foreigner, Mr. Ooms, of Amsterdam, beating Mr. Boyd, of Trinity College, Dublin, in final heat.

- 8, 9.—Terrible conflagration at St. John's, Newfoundland, two-thirds of city, including cathedral and many public buildings, being destroyed, some lives lost, and about eight thousand persons left homeless. The money loss exceeded two millions sterling.
- 9.—Disastrous boiler explosion on saloon steamer "Mont Blanc" at Ouchy, on Lake of Geneva, twenty-six persons being killed and forty injured.
- Eton and Harrow cricket match won by Harrow by sixty-four runs.
- 11.—Ravachol, the notorious anarchist and dynamiter, guillotined at Mont Brison, in France, for a murder committed over a year ago.
- 12.—Mr. John Hutton elected Chairman of the London County Council in succession to Lord Rosebery.
- Appalling disaster at St. Gervais-les-Bains, near Chamounix, where three large bathing establishments were overwhelmed by a flooded torrent, and a hundred and sixty persons perished.
- 13.—In return match at the Oval, Players again beat Gentlemen, winning by ten wickets.
- 14.—Duke of Connaught opened new water supply at Liverpool from Lake Vyrnwy, which took eleven years to construct, and cost two and a half millions.
- 15.—At Sandhurst Park, amid great enthusiasm, the Eclipse Stakes of £10,000 won by Orme, who beat Orvieto, St. Damien, and four others.
- The Wingfield Sculls won by Mr. V. Nickalls, his opponents being Messrs. Kennedy and Cumming.
- 16.—News arrived that owing to volcanic eruption the Island of Sangir, near the Philippines, had been partially destroyed, and two thousand persons killed.
- 21.—Diplomatic relations with Morocco abruptly broken off in consequence of the hostile attitude assumed at Fez towards the British Mission.
- 22.—Liverpool Cup won by Nunthorpe, nine running.
- 23.—At Bisley, Queen's Prize of £250 and gold badge and medal, won by Major Pollock, 3rd Renfrew.
- 26, 28.—At Goodwood, the Stewards' Cup won by Marvel, thirty running; Goodwood Stakes by Ralph Neville; Sussex Stakes by Orme; Cup by Martagon; and Prince of Wales's Stakes by Silene.
- 27.—"The City of Paris" arrived at New York from Queenstown in 5 days 15 hours 58 min., fastest time ever made.
- 2.—Arrival of German Emperor at Cowes on visit to the Queen.
- The Dunmow Flitch awarded to an octogenarian couple.
- Annual meeting of the National Artillery Association at Shoeburyness.
- 3.—Royal Yacht Squadron Queen's Cup won by "Corsair" on time allowance from German Emperor's "Meteor," which came in first.
- Four hundredth anniversary of departure of Christopher Columbus on his memorable voyage.
- 4.—Meeting of Parliament; Mr. Peel re-elected Speaker of House of Commons.
- 7.—Departure of German Emperor for home.
- 11.—In House of Commons the "no confidence" motion carried by 350 votes to 310, largest division on record, the members present being only five short of full representation of the United Kingdom.
- 12.—Announcement of resignation of Lord Salisbury's Government, and that Her Majesty had sent to Mr. Gladstone to form a new Administration.
- The race for the Commodore Cup of Royal Victoria Yacht Club, round Isle of Wight, won by German Emperor's "Meteor."
- 13, 14.—At Herne Hill, Mr. J. H. Adams bicycled 100 miles in 5 hours 4 min. 18 $\frac{1}{2}$  sec., and at Neuilly M. Fournier covered 25 miles in 61 min. 21 sec., both records.
- 14.—While being towed in ballast from Glasgow to Liverpool, the new four-masted ship "Thracian" sank, and all on board perished.
- 15.—Mr. Gladstone visited Osborne and submitted list of the members of his Ministry to the Queen for approval.
- 17.—At Tredegar, a new model lodging-house burnt down, and eleven lives lost.
- 24.—Great Ebor won by Alice.
- 25.—Anchor Line steamer "Anglia," homeward bound, capsized in the Hooghly river, and thirteen of crew drowned.
- Very serious outbreak of Asiatic cholera in Hamburg and Havre, numerous fatal cases having occurred in both cities.
- 26.—Terrible explosion at Park Slip Colliery, near Bridgend, South Wales, by which one hundred and ten miners lost their lives.
- In the cricket match at Taunton between Somerset and Yorkshire, Hewett and Palairot, who went in first for Somerset, scored the record number of 346 before being separated, the whole innings realising the extraordinary total of 592.
- 30.—The Roman Catholic Total Abstinence League of the Cross held its eighteenth annual festival at the Crystal Palace, a great gathering, which included the Archbishop of Westminster, being present.
- 31.—Close of the first-class cricket season, Surrey being again left champion county, with Notts a good second, and Somersetshire ranking third.

## AUGUST, 1892.

- 1.—Bank Holiday, with fine weather, and everywhere crowds of holiday-makers.

## OBITUARY FOR 1891-1892.

ALTHOUGH not one of the great ones of the earth, CHARLES JAMRACH, who died on the 6th September, 1891, had considerable reputation as a dealer in wild animals, and his extensive store, where rattlesnakes, lions, elephants, monkeys, and almost every kind of bird and beast were on sale, has long been one of the institutions of the East End of London. On the 9th September, JULES GRÉVY, ex-President of the French Republic, died in retirement at the age of eighty-four years. In the same month died the REV. DR. SADLER, the editor of "Crab Robinson's Diary," and an eminent Unitarian minister; the REV. GEO. ROGERS, a well-known clergyman, at ninety-two years of age; and WILLIAM PARTIDGE at seventy-three, sometime police magistrate. The world of art lost WILLIAM THEED, a sculptor of some distinction, and SIR JOHN STEEL, R.A., Scotland, a veteran in the same branch of art, aged eighty-seven years. The last day of September was noticeable for the somewhat theatrical exit of GENERAL BOULANGER, who shot himself over the grave of his deceased mistress.

On the 5th and 6th October, two well-known figures were removed from Parliamentary and political life, CHARLES STEWART PARNELL, the great Irish leader, who died at forty-five years of age, and the RIGHT HON. W. H. SMITH, First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons, aged sixty-six years. WILLIAM ALEXANDER BARRATT, composer and musical critic, died on the 17th October, in his fifty-seventh year; and the last surviving officer who served at the Battle of Waterloo, LIEUT.-COL. HEWETT, died on the 26th of the same month, aged ninety-six years.

The 3rd November witnessed the death of PRINCE LUCIEN BUONAPARTE, aged seventy-eight years, nephew of the great Emperor, but himself of no other renown than as a philologist. On the 12th died the HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD, aged forty-nine years, well known in artistic and dramatic circles. MR. HAGGIS, deputy-chairman of the London County Council, died suddenly on the 24th, and the following day was marked by the also sudden demise of our Ambassador at Paris, LORD LYTTON, who had previously held the high office of Viceroy of India, the son of the distinguished novelist, and himself, as "Owen Meredith," a poet of some renown.

December was marked by the death on the 13th of W. G. WILLS, dramatic author, of amiable and distinguished character, at the age of sixty-three years. DR. HAROLD BROWNE, the ex-Bishop of Winchester, aged eighty, died on the 17th, and the DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE on the 21st, aged eighty-three, the latter an event of some importance in the political world, as it caused the removal of his son, the Marquis of Hartington, to the Upper House. SIR THOMAS CHAMBERS, the City Recorder, died on the 24th, aged seventy-seven, and Christmas Day was marked by the

death of MR. WEIST HILL, of the Guildhall School of Music. Another popular composer died on the 28th, MR. ALFRED CELLIER, in the midst of preparations for the production of his music in the comic opera of "The Mountebanks." On the 30th died MR. W. H. DAVENPORT ADAMS, a practised literary workman, aged sixty-three years; and the last day of the year witnessed the death of PRINCE VICTOR OF HORENLOHE, who as Count Gleichen had earned some reputation as a sculptor.

The year 1892 opened sadly enough. The death of the DUKE OF CLARENCE on the 14th January, aged twenty-nine years, on the eve of his marriage, caused general sorrow and regret; and the decease on the same day of CARDINAL MANNING, aged eighty-three years, added to the prevailing gloom. The distinguished orator and preacher, the REV. C. H. SPURGEON, died at Mentone on the 31st January, in his fifty-ninth year. SIR GEORGE AIRY, Astronomer Royal, died on the 2nd January, aged ninety, and on the 3rd died J. D. WATSON, an excellent artist in water-colours, aged fifty-nine. MARGARET, LADY SANDHURST, one of the leaders of the host of advanced women, died on the 7th January, aged sixty-four years. A well-known personage among caravans and circus tents was removed by the death of FREDERICK GINNET, circus proprietor, on the 12th January, aged sixty-nine years, and a figure still more familiar to the veteran frequenters of the equestrian circle passed away by the death, on the 13th March, of WALLET, who styled himself "the Shakespearean Clown," or sometimes "the Queen's Jester," at the ripe age of eighty-six years.

February was marked by the death of SIR MORELL MACKENZIE, the eminent specialist on diseases of the throat, whose services to the late Emperor Frederick of Germany will long be remembered. On the 16th March died EDWARD A. FREEMAN, the eminent historian of the Norman period, who was born in 1823. VISCOUNT HAMPDEN, ex-Speaker of the House of Commons, died on the 14th March. On the 26th expired WALT WHITMAN, the American poet, aged seventy-four years. The lamentable death of MR. GORING THOMAS, musical composer, author of the score of the popular opera of "Esmeralda," occurred at West Hampstead Station on the 20th March.

On April 2nd died JOHN MURRAY, publisher, third of that well-known name. On the 9th May LORD BRAMWELL died, who was born in 1808. July 12th witnessed the death of CYRUS FIELD, the pioneer of sub-Atlantic telegraphs; and on the 18th died THOMAS COOK, the veteran entrepreneur of travel, who was born 1808. ROBERT LOWE, LORD SHERBROOKE, once Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, and a distinguished Parliamentary leader, passed away on the 27th July, aged eighty-one years.

On the 18th August died the famous prima donna, MADAME TREBELLINI BETTINI, born in 1838.

## CALENDAR FOR 1893.

## JANUARY.

1	S	1st Sunday after Christmas.
2	M	Mrs. Elizabeth Charles born, 1828.
3	T	Douglas Jerrold born, 1808.
4	W	E. L. Sambourne born, 1845.
5	Th	Elizabeth Griffith, novelist, died, 1793.
6	F	Epiphany. Mrs. W. E. Gladstone born,
7	S	G. A. Storey, A.R.A., born, 1834. [1812.
8	S	1st Sunday after Epiphany.
9	M	Napoleon III. died, 1873.
10	T	Miss Mitford died, 1855.
11	W	Katherine Philips, poet, born 1681; died 1664.
12	Th	Arabella Goddard born, 1838.
13	F	Right Hon. Henry Matthews born, 1826.
14	S	John Cordy Jeaffreson born, 1831.
15	S	2nd Sunday after Epiphany.
16	M	Duc d'Angule born, 1822.
17	T	Pierre A. Chereul born, 1809.
18	W	Lord Lytton, novelist, died, 1873.
19	Th	Charles P. Villiers born, 1802.
20	F	John Linnell died, 1882.
21	S	Mdme. de Grandval born, 1830.
22	S	3rd Sunday after Epiphany.
23	M	John R. Herbert, R.A., born, 1810.
24	T	Charles J. Fox born, 1749; died, 1806.
25	W	Princess Royal married, 1858.
26	Th	Mrs. Frances Brooke, novelist, died, 1789.
27	F	William, Emperor of Germany, born, 1859.
28	S	Fanny A. Kortright born, 1821.
29	S	Septuagesima.
30	M	Mrs. Clobber, actress, died, 1766.
31	T	Marie Joseph Cabel born, 1827.

## MOON'S PHASES.

2nd.	Full Moon	.. 1A. 41m.	Afternoon.
9th.	Last Quarter	.. 10 28	Afternoon.
18th.	New Moon	.. 1 28	Morning.
25th.	First Quarter	.. 6 27	Morning.

## MARCH.

1	W	St. David's Day.
2	Th	Marie Roze born, 1846.
3	F	Thomas Otway born, 1651.
4	S	Eliz. B. Browning born, 1809; died, 1861.
		Mrs. Abington, actress, died, 1815.
5	S	3rd Sunday in Lent.
6	M	Du Maurier born, 1834.
7	T	St. Perpetua.
8	W	Sir R. Temple born, 1828.
9	Th	Anne Seward died, 1809.
10	F	Princess of Wales married, 1863.
11	S	Wilhelmine von Hillern born, 1836.
12	S	4th Sunday in Lent. [lage born, 1825.
13	M	Sophie Crayville born, 1829. Fraulein Dinck.
14	T	Admiral Byang shot, 1757.
15	W	Mrs. Kendall born, 1849.
16	Th	Duchess of Kent died, 1861.
17	F	St. Patrick's Day.
18	S	Princess Louise of Lorne born, 1848.
19	S	5th Sunday in Lent.
20	M	E. J. Poynter, R.A., born, 1836.
21	T	Dorothea Beale born, 1831.
22	W	Rosalie Bonheur born, 1822.
23	Th	Emperor Paul assassinated, 1801.
24	F	Fanny Sewald born, 1811.
25	S	Annunciation. Lady Day.
26	S	6th Sunday in Lent. Palm Sunday.
27	M	James I. died, 1625.
28	T	Alice King born, 1839.
29	W	Jane Elliot died, 1805.
30	Th	The Sicilian Vespers, 1282.
31	F	Good Friday.

## MOON'S PHASES.

2nd.	Full Moon	.. 4A. 3m.	Afternoon.
10th.	Last Quarter	.. 5 14	Afternoon.
18th.	New Moon	.. 4 24	Morning.
24th.	First Quarter	.. 9 34	Afternoon.

## FEBRUARY.

1	W	St. Bridget.
2	Th	Purification. Candlemas.
3	F	Dr. Eliz. Blackwell born, 1821.
4	S	John Westlake, Q.C., born, 1828.
5	S	Sexagesima.
6	M	Queen Anne born, 1665; died, 1714.
7	T	Charles Dickens born, 1812; died, 1870.
8	W	Queen Mary born, 1515; died, 1558.
9	Th	Dr. Maskelyne, Astronomer Royal, died, [1811.
10	F	Queen Victoria married, 1840.
11	S	William Shenstone, poet, died, 1763.
12	S	Quinquagesima.
13	M	Lord Randolph Churchill born, 18'9.
14	T	Shrove Tuesday.
15	W	Ash Wednesday.
16	Th	Countess Hülseu born, 1829.
17	F	Duchess of Albany born, 1861.
18	S	Martin Luther died, 1546.
19	S	1st Sunday in Lent. Adelina Patti born, [1849.
20	M	Duchess of Fife born, 1867.
21	T	Alice E. Freeman, Ph.D., born, 1855.
22	W	Adelaide Ann Procter died, 1864.
23	Th	Joanna Bailie died, 1851.
24	F	St. Matthias, Apostle and Martyr.
25	S	Sir Christopher Wren died, 1723.
26	S	2nd Sunday in Lent.
27	M	Ellen Terry born, 1848.
28	T	Throt defeated and killed, 1760.

## MOON'S PHASES.

1st.	Full Moon	.. 2A. 11m.	Morning.
8th.	Last Quarter	.. 8 12	Afternoon.
16th.	New Moon	.. 4 17	Afternoon.
23rd.	First Quarter	.. 2 14	Afternoon.

## APRIL.

1	S	Mrs. Scott Siddons' début in London, 1807.
2	S	Easter Sunday.
3	M	Mrs. Spofford born, 1835.
4	T	Lord Kenyon died, 1802.
5	W	Julesa Ferry born, 1832.
6	Th	Duchess of Cambridge died, 1889.
7	F	Miss Reay, actress, shot, 1779.
8	S	Madame Bodichon born, 1827.
9	S	1st Sunday after Easter. Low Sunday.
10	M	"General" Booth born, 1829. [1689.
11	T	Queen Mary and King William crowned, [1892.
12	W	Admiral Sir Provo Wallis born, 1791; died, [1892.
13	Th	David C. Murray born, 1847.
14	F	Princess Beatrice born, 1857.
15	S	Earl of Devon born, 1807.
16	S	2nd Sunday after Easter. Eclipse of Sun, invisible at Greenwich.
17	M	Zare Thalberg born, 1858.
18	T	G. H. Lewes born, 1819.
19	W	Primrose Day.
20	Th	Napoleon III. born, 1808.
21	F	Charlotte Brontë born, 1816; died, 1855.
22	S	Henry Fielding born, 1707; died, 1754.
23	S	3rd Sunday after Easter. St. George's Day.
24	M	Mdlle. Royer born, 1830.
25	T	St. Mark, Evangelist and Martyr.
26	W	Edward Hume born, 1711.
27	Th	Edward Whymper born, 1840.
28	F	Charles Cotton born, 1630.
29	S	General Boulanger born, 1837; died, 1891.
30	S	4th Sunday after Easter.

## MOON'S PHASES.

1st.	Full Moon	.. 7A. 18m.	Morning.
9th.	Last Quarter	.. 11 35	Morning.
16th.	New Moon	.. 2 35	Afternoon.
23rd.	First Quarter	.. 5 26	Morning.
30th.	Full Moon	.. 11 23	Afternoon.



## MAY.

1	M	SS. Philip and James.
2	T	Catherine II. of Russia born, 1729.
3	W	Invention of the Cross. Holy Rood.
4	Th	Charlotte Smith, poet, born, 1749.
5	F	Empress Eugénie born, 1826.
6	S	Cardinal Jacobini born, 1832.
7	S	Rogation Sunday.
8	M	Blanche Pierson born, 1842.
9	T	Mrs. White Mario born, 1832.
10	W	E. Owens Blackburne born, 1848.
11	Th	Ascension Day.
12	F	John R. Hind, astronomer, born, 1823.
13	S	Sir Arthur Sullivan born, 1842.
14	S	Sunday after Ascension.
15	M	Michael W. Balfe born, 1808.
16	T	Felicia Hemans died, 1835.
17	W	Empress Catherine I. of Russia died, 1727.
18	Th	Alphonse Daudet born, 1840.
19	F	Queen Charlotte born, 1744; died, 1818.
20	S	J. D. Watson, artist, born, 1832; died, 1892.
21	S	Whit Sunday.
22	M	Isabella Glynne born, 1825. [1860.
23	T	Sir Chas. Barry, architect, born, 1795; died,
24	W	Queen Victoria born.
25	Th	Princess Christian born, 1846.
26	F	Capel Loft died, 1824.
27	S	Princess Mathilde Buonaparte born, 1820.
28	S	Trinity Sunday.
29	M	Gerald Massey born, 1828.
30	T	Joan of Arc burnt, 1431.
31	W	Walt Whitman born, 1819; died, 1892.

## MOON'S PHASES.

9th.	Last Quarter	..	24.	24m.	Morning.
15th.	New Moon	..	10	47	Afternoon.
22nd.	First Quarter	..	2	52	Afternoon.
30th.	Full Moon	..	3	23	Afternoon.

## JUNE.

1	Th	Corpus Christi.
2	F	Garibaldi died, 1882.
3	S	Madame Thoresen born, 1819.
4	S	1st Sunday after Trinity.
5	M	Adam Smith born, 1723.
6	T	P. Corneille born, 1606; died, 1684.
7	W	Charlotte, ex-Empress Mexico, born, 1840.
8	Th	Mahomet died, 632.
9	F	Mrs. Camilla Crossland born, 1812.
10	S	Clara Novello born, 1818.
11	S	2nd Sunday after Trinity. St. Barnabas, Apostle and Martyr.
12	M	Charles Kingsley born, 1819; died, 1875.
13	T	Helen, Lady Dufferin, died, 1867.
14	W	Hon. Caroline Norton died, 1877.
15	Th	Mrs. Harriet B. Snow born, 1811.
16	F	Frances Brown born, 1818.
17	S	Louise von Francois born, 1817.
18	S	3rd Sunday after Trinity.
19	M	Rev. C. H. Spurgeon born, 1834; died, 1892.
20	T	Anna L. Barbauld born, 1748; died, 1825.
21	W	Madame de Mirabeau born, 1829.
22	Th	Mrs. Cowden Clarke born, 1809.
23	F	Catherine M. Graham, author, died, 1791.
24	S	St. John Baptist. Quarter Day.
25	S	4th Sunday after Trinity.
26	M	Madame Villari born, 1836.
27	T	Harriet Martineau died, 1876.
28	W	Queen's Coronation, 1838.
29	Th	St. Peter, Apostle and Martyr.
30	F	E. J. Hopkins, Mus. Doc., born, 1818.

## MOON'S PHASES.

7th.	Last Quarter	..	14.	43m.	Afternoon.
14th.	New Moon	..	5	51	Morning.
21st.	First Quarter	..	2	37	Morning.
29th.	Full Moon	..	6	25	Morning.

## JULY.

1	S	Battle of the Boyne, 1690.
2	S	5th Sunday after Trinity.
3	M	Louis XI. born, 1423; died, 1483.
4	T	Madame Sophie Schwartz born, 1819.
5	W	Sarah Siddons born, 1755.
6	Th	Princess Victoria of Wales born, 1868.
7	F	R. Brinsley Sheridan died, 1816.
8	S	Percy B. Shelley drowned, 1822.
9	S	6th Sunday after Trinity.
10	M	Aphra Behn baptized, 1640.
11	T	Madame Regnier born, 1849.
12	W	Clara Louise Kellogg born, 1842.
13	Th	Charlotte Corday assassinated Marat, 1793.
14	F	Mrs. Margaret Lucas born, 1818.
15	S	Madame de Staël died, 1817. [born, 1766.
16	S	7th Sunday after Trinity. Caroline Oliphant
17	M	Dr. Isaac Watts born, 1674; died, 1748.
18	T	Madame Garcia Viardot born, 1821.
19	W	Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz born, 1822.
20	Th	St. Margaret.
21	F	Matthew Prior born, 1664.
22	S	St. Mary Magdalene.
23	S	8th Sunday after Trinity.
24	M	Jane Austen died, 1817.
25	T	St. James, Apostle and Martyr.
26	W	St. Anne.
27	Th	Duchess of Fife married, 1889.
28	F	Mary Anderson born, 1859.
29	S	SS. Martha and Mary.
30	S	9th Sunday after Trinity.
31	M	Paul du Chailu born, 1835.

## MOON'S PHASES.

6th.	Last Quarter	..	10h.	5m.	Afternoon.
13th.	New Moon	..	0	47	Afternoon.
20th.	First Quarter	..	5	3	Afternoon.
28th.	Full Moon	..	8	10	Afternoon.

## AUGUST.

1	T	Maria Mitchell, astronomer, born, 1818.
2	W	John Hoole, poet, died, 1803.
3	Th	Christine Nilsson born, 1843.
4	F	Percy B. Shelley born, 1792.
5	S	Carola, Queen of Saxony, born, 1833.
6	S	10th Sunday after Trinity. Madame de Witt
7	M	Queen Caroline died, 1821. [born, 1829.
8	T	Emma Vely born, 1848.
9	W	Earl Sidney born, 1805.
10	Th	Mary E. Ropes born, 1842.
11	F	Mrs. S. M. B. Piatt born, 1836.
12	S	Lady M. W. Montagu married, 1712.
13	S	11th Sunday after Trinity.
14	M	Letitia E. Landon born, 1802; died, 1838.
15	T	Madame Scopoli-Biasi born, 1810.
16	W	Frances Mary Buss born, 1827.
17	Th	Madame Dacier, savante, died, 1720.
18	F	St. Helena.
19	S	Madame Pignocchi born, 1816.
20	S	12th Sunday after Trinity.
21	M	Lady Mary Wortley Montague died, 1762.
22	T	Sir C. F. H. Doyle b rn, 1810.
23	W	Queen of Belgians born, 1836.
24	Th	St. Bartholomew, Apostle and Martyr.
25	F	Elizabeth Montague, essayist, died, 1800.
26	S	Henry Fawcett born, 1833; died, 1884.
27	S	13th Sunday after Trinity.
28	M	Robespierre killed, 1794.
29	T	Joseph Wright, artist, died, 1797.
30	W	Jerusalem destroyed, A.D. 70. [1880.
31	Th	Wilhelmina, Queen of Netherlands, born,

## MOON'S PHASES.

5th.	Last Quarter	..	4h.	23m.	Morning.
11th.	New Moon	..	8	48	Afternoon.
19th.	First Quarter	..	9	52	Morning.
27th.	Full Moon	..	8	43	Morning.

## SEPTEMBER.

1	F	Margaret, Countess of Blessington, born, 1789.
2	S	Amelia Opie died, 1853.
3	S	14th Sunday after Trinity.
4	M	Sir Wilfrid Lawson born, 1829.
5	T	Queen Catherine Parr died, 1548.
6	W	Shakespeare Jubilee, 1769.
7	Th	Queen Elizabeth born, 1533; died, 1603.
8	F	Nativity B.V. Mary.
9	S	John Hollingshead born, 1827.
10	S	15th Sunday after Trinity.
11	M	Lady Palmerston died, 1869.
12	T	C. D. Warner born, 1829.
13	W	Madame Clara Schumann born, 1819.
14	Th	Moscow burnt, 1812.
15	F	Adeline D. T. Whitney born, 1824.
16	S	Anna Kingsford, M.D., born, 1846.
17	S	16th Sunday after Trinity.
18	M	Dr. Samuel Johnson born, 1709; died, 1781.
19	T	Hartley Coleridge born, 1796; died, 1849.
20	W	Battle of the Alma, 1854.
21	Th	S. Matthew, Apos. Evangelist, and Martyr.
22	F	Battle of Mycæ, 429 B.C.
23	S	Lady Georgina Fullerton born, 1812.
24	S	17th Sunday after Trinity. Eliza Cook died, [1889].
25	M	Felicia Hemans born, 1794.
26	T	William Hazlitt born, 1811.
27	W	William Rufus crowned, 1087.
28	Th	Frances E. Willard born, 1839.
29	F	St. Michael and All Angels. Quarter Day.
30	S	Bermudez, President, Peru, born, 1836.

## MOON'S PHASES.

3rd.	Last Quarter	.. 9h. 42m. Morning.
10th.	New Moon	.. 7 5 Morning.
18th.	First Quarter	.. 4 19 Morning.
25th.	Full Moon	.. 8 23 Afternoon.

## NOVEMBER.

1	W	All Saints' Day.
2	Th	All Souls' Day. Jenny Lind died, 1887.
3	F	Emily Ann Sheriff born, 1814.
4	S	James Montgomery, poet, born, 1771.
5	S	23rd Sunday after Trinity.
6	M	Princess Charlotte died, 1817.
7	T	Madame Wiegmann born, 1826.
8	W	Madame Marie Schwartz born, 1821.
9	Th	Princess of Wales born, 1841.
10	F	Oliver Goldsmith born, 1728.
11	S	Martinmas.
12	S	24th Sunday after Trinity.
13	M	Lady Jane Grey arraigned, 1553.
14	T	Anne Holey married, 1532.
15	W	Earl of Chatham born, 1708; died, 1778.
16	Th	Louisa Jopling born, 1848.
17	F	Accession of Queen Elizabeth, 1558.
18	S	Aea Gray born, 1810.
19	S	25th Sunday after Trinity.
20	M	Queen Caroline died, 1737.
21	T	Princess Royal (Empress Germany) b., 1840.
22	W	St. Cecilia. George Eliot born, 1819.
23	Th	Father Ignatius born, 1837.
24	F	Mrs. Frances Burnett born, 1849.
25	S	Giulia Grisi died, 1869.
26	S	26th Sunday after Trinity.
27	M	Frances Ann Kemble born, 1811.
28	T	King Alfonso of Spain born, 1857; died, 1885.
29	W	Rhoda Broughton born, 1840.
30	Th	St. Andrew, Apostle and Martyr.

## MOON'S PHASES.

8th.	New Moon	.. 0h. 57m. Afternoon.
16th.	First Quarter	.. 5 45 Afternoon.
23rd.	Full Moon	.. 6 8 Afternoon.
30th.	Last Quarter	.. 9 8 Morning.

## OCTOBER.

1	S	18th Sunday after Trinity.
2	M	Fire of London, 1666.
3	T	George Bancroft (Hist.), born, 1800; died, 1891.
4	W	Madame Lemmens Sherrington born, 1834.
5	Th	John Addington Symonds born, 1840.
6	F	Jenny Lind born, 1821; died, 1887.
7	S	Miss Bateman born, 1842.
8	S	19th Sunday after Trinity.
9	M	Annular Eclipse of Sun, invis. at Greenwich.
10	T	William Minto born, 1845.
11	W	Mrs. Belva A. Lockwood born, 1830.
12	Th	Mrs. D. M. Craik died, 1867.
13	F	Mrs. Chapone born, 1727; died, 1801.
14	S	Sir W. V. Harcourt born, 1827.
15	S	20th Sunday after Trinity.
16	M	Earl of Cardigan born, 1797; died, 1868.
17	T	Duchess of Edinburgh born, 1853.
18	W	St. Luke, Evangelist.
19	Th	Henry Kirke White died, 1806.
20	F	Battle of Salamis, 480 B.C.
21	S	Sims Reeves born, 1822.
22	S	21st Sunday after Trinity.
23	M	Sir M. Hicks Beach born, 1837.
24	T	Arabella Buckley born, 1840.
25	W	Mrs. Annie Hall Cudlip born, 1838.
26	Th	Dr. Doddridge died, 1751.
27	F	Amy Sedgwick born, 1835.
28	S	St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles.
29	S	22nd Sunday after Trinity.
30	M	Adelaide Procter born, 1825; died, 1864.
31	T	John Keats born, 1795.

## MOON'S PHASES.

2nd.	Last Quarter	.. 3A. 19m. Afternoon.
9th.	New Moon	.. 8 27 Afternoon.
17th.	First Quarter	.. 11 20 Afternoon.
25th.	Full Moon	.. 7 28 Morning.
31st.	Last Quarter	.. 10 42 Afternoon.

## DECEMBER.

1	F	Princess of Wales born, 1844.
2	S	Queen Adelaide died, 1849.
3	S	Advent Sunday.
4	M	Frances Power Cobbe born, 1832.
5	T	Christina G. Rossetti born, 1830.
6	W	Caroline Bowles born, 1786.
7	Th	Rachel Bodley, M.D., born, 1831.
8	F	Mary, Queen of Scots, born, 1542; died, 1587.
9	S	John Milton born, 1608; died, 1674.
10	S	2nd Sunday in Advent.
11	M	Sir David Brewster born, 1781.
12	T	Nicholas Rowe died, 1718.
13	W	Duke of Rutland born, 1818.
14	Th	Princess Alice died, 1878.
15	F	Sarah Trimmer died, 1810.
16	S	Jane Austen born, 1776; died, 1817.
17	S	3rd Sunday in Advent.
18	M	Madame Colban born, 1814.
19	T	Mary Ashton Livermore born, 1821.
20	W	Frances Elizabeth Hoggan born, 1843.
21	Th	St. Thomas.
22	F	"George Eliot" died, 1880.
23	S	Sir George Denman born, 1819.
24	S	4th Sunday in Advent.
25	M	Christmas Day.
26	T	St. Stephen.
27	W	St. John, Apostle and Evangelist.
28	Th	Innocents' Day.
29	F	W. E. Gladstone born, 1809.
30	S	Elizabeth Gluck born, 1815.
31	S	1st Sunday after Christmas.

## MOON'S PHASES.

8th.	New Moon	.. 7h. 40m. Morning.
16th.	First Quarter	.. 10 21 Morning.
23rd.	Full Moon	.. 4 37 Morning.
29th.	Last Quarter	.. 11 18 Afternoon.

Golden Number..	.. 13	Solar Cycle ..	.. 26	Roman Indiction ..	.. 6
Epact ..	.. 12	Dominical Letter ..	.. A.	Julian Period ..	.. 6006

THE EXTRA

# CHRISTMAS NUMBER

OF

## ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

# TAKEN ON TRUST.

BY  
**MARY ANGELA DICKENS,**  
 Author of "Cross Currents," "A Mist of Error," "Her Inheritance," "A Social Success,"  
 "Kitty's Victim," "An Outstanding Debt," etc., etc.  
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**MARGARET MOULE,**  
 Author of "The Thirteenth Brydain," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy,"  
 "The Vicar's Aunt," "A Spring Dream," etc., etc.

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### CHAPTER I. A TRUCE.

THERE was a good deal of west wind, and it swept across the rather characterless Hertfordshire county with the wild, soft rush peculiar to it, and so curiously suggestive. On either side of a road, which wound on and away white and deserted in the quiet of a lovely April afternoon, stretched field after field, divided by low hedges just clothed in their spring beauty.

Along the road there came a girl. She was tall and slender, with a graceful, elastic figure, and came on against the wind swiftly, with smooth, springy steps. Her face was very pretty, and it was very sure to arrest attention by reason of its curiously frank and unconscious display of character. Every mobile line from the little chin to the delicate arched eyebrows spoke of spirit which might express itself in many ways from self-will to self-devotion, ac-

cording to the leading of education and circumstances, but must evince itself surely in some form or other at every turn. The mouth was rather large but very sensitive, and at this moment, as it curved into a smile, very sweet; the nose was straight and rather short, with finely-cut nostrils, and the large, clear blue eyes revealed another characteristic of their owner. Nobody meeting their direct gaze could have doubted that the spirit within them was proud, or could have failed to imagine their capacity for the expression of scorn. The whole face was delicately coloured, and the hair, a little ruffled by the wind, was a bright brown. The girl was dressed simply, but with that dauntiness of detail which is the most subtle suggestion of wealth.

No other figure was visible upon the road; no other figure, no habitation even, was visible among the fields on either hand. And against the monotonous background

they afforded, the girlish figure stood out with a curious effect of loneliness—an effect which was somehow accentuated by the girl's obvious unconsciousness of it. Her pose and expression alike conveyed an impression that her evident enjoyment of the wind and the motion was instinctive and that her thoughts were otherwise employed; and not unpleasantly employed, to judge by the smile in the blue eyes. Turning a sharp curve in the road, she began to descend a long incline, her solitary figure shut in now by high hedges. The descent continued for perhaps a mile, when the landscape opened out again.

To the right and left the foreground was occupied by a large and finely-wooded park; in front the park was merged after about a quarter of a mile in gardens, beyond which, on a slight rising, stood a large house. It was of grey stone, and its severe Ionic front looked so incongruous as to be almost forbidding. Shut in alone by the green slopes surrounding it, with that peculiar lifelessness about it that so often characterises a great house seen from any distance, there was something strangely dreary about it; and as the girl, opening a little gate in the palings, turned into the park and began to move towards it, her loneliness seemed natural and harmonious.

She had looked about her not at all as she came along the road; but now as she walked across the soft park turf the thoughts that had occupied her apparently gave way, and the blue eyes glanced hither and thither with a look of bright, appreciative authority. She unlocked the gate leading into the garden with another key from the bunch that had supplied one for the gate of the park itself, and before passing through she stooped and gathered some daffodils growing close to the palings. Then she went on through the gardens to a door in the side of the house. She opened it, passed along a corridor and across a wide hall with a light, assured step to a room on the opposite side, into which a man-servant was just carrying tea. It was a drawing-room, occupying nearly the length of one side of the house, with four long windows in the wall facing the door, and two huge fireplaces, one at the end of the room, the other to the right of the door. In the former, in spite of the warmth of the day, a fire was burning, and near it in a large arm-chair sat a fair-haired little woman in black.

She turned as the girl came in, and received her with a hesitating murmur of welcome. She had a weak, plaintive face, and a fragile, helpless-looking figure, and as the girl stood looking down at her with a smile, they were a curious contrast.

"Is your head better, Marion?" asked the girl. Her voice was sweet and fresh, and a certain tender, pitying modulation which was rather that of strength for weakness than personal feeling made it irresistibly charming as she spoke.

"Yes, thank you. Oh, yes, much better," was the rather nervous answer, and then the girl turned to the footman, who was arranging the tea-things on a table near.

"Has any one called, Woods?" she asked carelessly.

And as the man answered briefly and respectfully and left the room, she sank into a low chair and began to busy herself with the teapot.

"Such a delicious afternoon, Marion," she exclaimed; "I wish you could have come with me. Look!" pointing to the daffodils which she had laid beside her on the table. "I picked those in the park. Aren't they sweet?"

The room was full of hothouse flowers, and the little woman addressed apparently preferred these to their humbler brethren; for she looked rather dubiously at the daffodils, though she was apparently by no means prepared to disagree with their admirer.

"Cake or bread and butter?" went on the latter lightly, rising with the cup of tea she had poured out, and as she did so the little woman rose, too, hastily.

"You really shouldn't," she protested hurriedly. "It—it's so wrong of me to let you wait on me! Your companion ought to wait on you, ought to pour out the tea, and save you all trouble. You pay me——"

"I pay you, if you will insist on remembering it, for your society, Marion. I pay other people to be my servants."

Having spoken, the girl put her hand on the other's shoulder and pushed her gently into her chair again, as she said, with a swift transition from the imperative to the reassuring which was very charming:

"How can we live together if we are not friends? And how can we be friends if we don't give and take? You chaperon me—I must be chaperoned, that is certain—and I take care of you. You must be



taken care of, that is equally certain. The money—oh, the money doesn't count!"

And with that sweeping assertion, the girl reseated herself and poured out her own cup of tea.

The dialogue was followed by a short silence. The little woman subsided into her chair with an inarticulate murmur of gratitude; the girl drank her tea, her eyes bright and reflective. At last her companion, feeling apparently that her position demanded of her something in the way of conversation, said tentatively:

"Did you settle about the cottages?"

The girl roused herself with a little start.

"Yes," she said. "At least, practically. I chose the site."

"Mr. Gaunt was waiting for you, I suppose. Was he very annoying?"

There was an instant's pause. The girl had taken off her hat and laid it in her lap, and now she clasped her hands behind her head, and laid it back against her chair.

"He has gone very thoroughly into the question of those cottages," she replied.

"And forced his knowledge on you as rudely as usual, I suppose?"

"I don't know," returned the girl vaguely. Then, apparently collecting her thoughts, she said, "I don't know that I think him exactly rude, Marion—not now, at least. He is abrupt, of course, but not rude, I should say."

There was a distinct note of reproof in the imperious voice, and the little woman's eyes widened in surprise. The conversation had evidently taken an unusual turn, and she was confused. Her tone was very diffident as she said, after a pause:

"You chose the site you originally intended, I suppose?"

The bright eyes were gazing straight before them with an abstracted ease, and they smiled as the girl answered:

"No; I chose Mr. Gaunt's site after all."

The little woman's lips parted in an expression of blank astonishment. She was evidently only restrained from an exclamation by uncertainty as to how such a proceeding would be received. Before she could think of anything sufficiently non-committal for expression the girl had risen and walked to the window. She looked out for a moment, and then strolled back again.

"The building is to begin at once,"

she observed. "Mr. Gaunt is to bring me up the estimates to-morrow. Well, Marion, I'm very dusty, and I shall go upstairs, I think."

She gathered up her daffodils, and as she turned to leave the room the footman came in again with three letters. She took them and glanced at their addresses.

"One for you, Marion," she said, handing the letter to the little woman, "and two for me. An invitation to the Grange, obviously, and—I don't know who the other is from. I'll take them up."

She passed out of the door into the hall, and up the wide staircase with the letters and the flowers in her hand, and a step and a carriage which made of her stately surroundings the natural setting for her youth and freshness.

The step and the carriage she had been born with. The surroundings had been hers for six months only.

Valentine Clinton had no remembrance of her father, who had died when she was still a baby, and scarcely any of her mother. Her mother's aunt, Miss Alethea Hilyard, when that mother married again and went with her husband to India, took temporarily a mother's place in Valentine's life. A year later, Valentine's mother died, and Miss Hilyard took that place for good. The two had lived together until, quite suddenly one autumn day, just after Valentine's twenty-first birthday, Miss Hilyard was struck down with paralysis and died, after lingering for a few days, unconscious even of the tears of the girl she was leaving so desolate. It was in the week succeeding those bitter days that news which, for the time, only served to accentuate her sense of loss and loneliness, was broken to Valentine by her aunt's lawyer.

Old Miss Hilyard, dying of paralysis, already to all intents and purposes beyond the changes and chances of this life, had succeeded to a large landed property in Hertfordshire. The chain of circumstances which had brought the property to her, involved that complete extinction of direct heirs which sometimes occurs in old families. Miss Hilyard being dead, the only creature with a claim on the estate was her great-niece, Valentine Clinton.

So Valentine, at twenty-two, had found herself the mistress not only of her own actions, great and small, but also of a large country house, with garden, park, and home farm, and of an income of some ten thousand a year.

In the early days of her loneliness and

grief, she refused to consider her inheritance. But as the slow months took from her grief its absorbing smart, the constantly recurring details connected with her estate began to interest her. This change of mental attitude came about with no consciousness on her own part. She woke up to it suddenly, and announced a determination with a high-handed impetuosity. She was going to live in her own house, and look after her own property, she stated; she would have a chaperon; and that point conceded, there could be no possible objection to her taking her own way on every other. Even had there been countless objections there was no one with authority to raise them. The old friends with whom she had spent the months which had elapsed since her aunt's death were on the point of giving up their London house to live abroad, and the plan seemed to them, on the whole, as good as any other.

Barely two months passed after her announcement of her intention, before Valentine was established with a retinue of servants and a chaperon, to reign in person over her own estate.

In no instance, in the whole course of the preliminary proceedings, had Valentine acted more characteristically than in her choice of her chaperon. The very first candidate for the position was a little woman of about thirty, whose husband had recently died, leaving her absolutely penniless. Mrs. Carryl was rather delicate, very helpless, entirely incapable of affording mental support to herself, much less to any one else; her opinion was always at the mercy of the last speaker; she was, in short, as Valentine's friends assured her with one accord, the very last person for the post.

But Valentine never considered Marion Carryl from that point of view. The shrinking, timid little woman, so pathetically and so obviously incapable of fighting with the world, touched the girl's generous heart; and she declared that she should see no one else. To all remonstrances she replied that it was not necessary that her chaperon should be old; that she did not want a woman with whom she was sure to quarrel; and that she meant to make Mrs. Carryl very happy.

And as far as the limitation of a feeble nature allowed she had made Mrs. Carryl happy. It had been a very uncertain, nervous species of happiness at first. Having endeavoured to nerve herself for the

battle of life by an exaggerated conception of the hardship and general contumely which it was to involve for her, the little woman found Valentine's ways painfully bewildering at first. Even after six months' constant intercourse, sudden misty realisations of their respective positions would rise up and confuse her. But as a rule the shallow current of her emotions flowed now as placidly as her days were passed. Nothing was asked of her in the way of independent action or opinion; and submission to Valentine on every point was rapidly becoming second nature to her.

Left alone in the large drawing-room, on Valentine's departure, Mrs. Carryl took up some delicate lace-work, calling for no originality in the worker, and began to work with painstaking content. She had not been so occupied, however, for more than a quarter of an hour when the door was opened with an impetuous movement, and Valentine, her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining with excitement, reappeared, an open letter in her hand.

"Marion," she cried, "oh, Marion, what do you think?"

#### CHAPTER II. THE TRUCE SUSPENDED.

MRS. CARRYL let her work fall on her knee, and looked up in bewildered expectancy. Sudden calls upon her were apt to confuse her, and her mind, for the moment, was more or less a blank. Without waiting for any response, however, Valentine went on, her sparkling eyes fixed on the letter in her hand.

"This—this letter is from Mr. Dorrisant, Marion!" she said, with a great excitement in every tone of her voice. "Mr. Dorrisant! He is actually in England, and he wants to know if he may come and see me! Oh, isn't it delightful!"

The words apparently conveyed no comprehension of the case to Mrs. Carryl. As a matter of fact they only increased her bewilderment.

"Delightful!" she echoed, obediently but feebly. "Who—who is Mr. Dorrisant, Valentine?"

"Who is he!" exclaimed Valentine, flashing a look of brilliant astonishment on her. "Marion, don't you know?"

Mrs. Carryl shook her head deprecatingly.

"I'm afraid not," she hesitated.

"What an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed Valentine. "I suppose I took it

for granted that you knew. He's my stepfather!"

"Your——"

Her amazement was too much for her slender resources, and Mrs. Carryl's small voice died away, leaving her looking up at Valentine, her face a very embodiment of blank astonishment. Valentine laughed, a ringing laugh eloquent of excitement.

Mrs. Carryl's eyes dilated with the effort of grasping the idea thus presented to her; she let her work fall from her knee to the floor, while she continued to gaze into the laughing, glowing face which was looking down at her; and then she said slowly and faintly:

"Your stepfather, Valentine?"

"My stepfather, Marion!" echoed the ringing, girlish voice. "You didn't know I had a stepfather?" Valentine went on, with a dozen notes of interrogation in her voice. "What a very extraordinary thing! My father died, you know, when I was a tiny baby, and my mother married again when I was four years old—married Mr. Dorrisant. He took her away to India at once; that was why I went to auntie"—her voice softened and lingered tenderly over the word—"and then, before they had been married quite a year, mother died, and auntie kept me altogether."

There was a pause; and then Mrs. Carryl originated a question:

"Is Mr. Dorrisant a soldier?" she said tentatively.

"No, he's not," was the quick answer. "I don't quite know what he is, or why he lived in India. He went to America afterwards."

"It is some years since you have seen him, I suppose?"

Valentine laughed again brightly.

"It's—let me see—it's seventeen years!" she cried. "When auntie wrote and asked him to let her have me—after mother died, I mean—he settled not to come back to England. Several times since then he has thought of coming, but it has always fallen through, and for the last two years I've quite lost sight of him. Now—oh, isn't it too delightful?"

Mrs. Carryl's mental processes were not rapid, and such a shower of surprising facts retarded them considerably.

"You—you don't know him, then?" she said confusedly.

"Well, I suppose, in the ordinary sense of the word, perhaps I don't," said Valentine, beginning to walk restlessly up and down the room as though her excitement

demanding an outlet. "But I feel as if I did. In the first place, you see, he was my mother's husband, and I can't think of her without thinking of him. Then I've got some letters he wrote me when I was little—such charming letters, Marion—and the letter he wrote to tell me of my mother's death, and the letter in which he gave me up to auntie. Only a very nice man could have written them. I should have written to him when—last year, you know—if I had known where he was. I was so very sorry when he left off writing to me."

She paused and glanced again at the letter in her hand, and in no way sensible of a blank, though Mrs. Carryl's ideas were not sufficiently coherent to allow of her making any further comment, she continued:

"And now he says that he is in England for a few months with a young ward of his. He says he will come on any day on which it will suit me to see him. Any day! He must stay, of course; a day is nothing!"

She moved swiftly across the room, and sitting down at the writing-table, began to write rapidly, as though the action were the natural and inevitable climax of her excitement.

In Valentine Clinton, as in most finely-tempered natures, the instinct of loving and the desire for love were alike strongly developed. Her heart was as warm as her temper was imperious, and since the death of her aunt her affection had been thrown back upon herself, producing in her a sense of want which she tried in vain to satisfy. It had been an unconscious instinct in this direction that had attracted her to Mrs. Carryl. But the sense of protecting affection with which Mrs. Carryl inspired her left the want untouched.

The sense of kin was likewise very strong in Valentine, perhaps because she was so singularly lonely.

The kinship existing between stepfather and stepdaughter is an undetermined quantity depending on individual decision, on circumstances, and on sentiment. Circumstances had done their best to neutralise all kinship between Valentine and her stepfather, but sentiment had triumphed over circumstance. Valentine's mother was the girl's most tender memory, a memory which had grown with her, gaining a deeper beauty year by year as she grew from childhood to girlhood, from girlhood to womanhood; a memory enshrined in her heart, apart even from the

memory of the aunt who had been everything to her, only not her mother. Her dead mother constituted for her, between herself and the man that mother had married, a bond slight indeed, but in no-wise to be broken.

The thought of him had been a continual interest to her, an interest all the keener for being always unsatisfied. The vague personality she had unconsciously created in her mind possessed for her the attraction of a magnet. That its original should some day come to England had been a day-dream with her ever since she could remember.

She dashed off her letter; a curiously unconscious realisation of the actual man as a stranger to her made it a few gracious, impulsive lines of pleasure and invitation; and throughout the evening that followed her excitement subsided not at all.

And her first words to Mrs. Carryl on the following morning, showed what her earliest waking thought had been. She spoke little as they sat together throughout the morning, but such words as came from her all had reference to the same subject, and the pauses that intervened were obviously filled in with happy, expectant meditations.

It was about twelve o'clock when one of these pauses was broken by the entrance of a servant.

"Mr. Gaunt is in the library, if you please, miss," he announced.

Valentine roused herself. She rose and lingered for a moment, lightly touching the glass of flowers which stood on a little table at her hand.

"He has brought the estimates for the cottages, I suppose!" she observed. "I shan't be very long, Marion," and then she turned and went out of the room.

A quarter of an hour passed, half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, and Valentine had not returned. Mrs. Carryl worked placidly, her mind as unoccupied as it is possible for the mind of a human creature to be; and becoming aware that she had made great progress, the inference forced itself slowly upon her that Valentine had been some time gone. She had just realised the fact, and was looking with surprise at the strip of lace which had revealed it, when the door opened again and Valentine came in, followed by a young man. She was looking unusually bright, holding her dairy head higher than usual, but with a pretty softness about her mouth.

"I have brought Mr. Gaunt to have some lunch, Marion," she said.

There was a shade of imperiousness in her tone which the simple statement hardly seemed to call for, and it gave a tinge of unusualness to the very ordinary circumstances—a tinge which was accentuated by the obvious astonishment with which Mrs. Carryl became aware of the young man's presence. She rose hurriedly, dropping all her work, and shook hands with him with an uncertainty of greeting comic in its helplessness.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered young man, well-made and athletic-looking, moving brusquely, though he was evidently a gentleman. He had dark hair and a brown complexion, and he was not handsome, though the deep-set brown eyes were very good. The most noticeable point about the irregular features was their all-pervading air of vitality and energy, a certain vigour and impulsiveness which made his face, considered apart from his figure and manner, look less than his twenty-nine years. The same vigour expressed itself in his way of speaking even the few words with which he returned Mrs. Carryl's greeting.

Kenneth Gaunt had been the agent on the property which was now Valentine Clinton's for the last three years. Mrs. Carryl's astonishment at his appearance in Valentine's drawing-room was not wonderful, since during their six months' intercourse as mistress and man the name of each had been a very abomination in the ears of the other. The last owner of Templecombe had been an absentee; consequently until Valentine appeared upon the scene Kenneth Gaunt had gone his own way with no one to dictate to him. His way as an agent was a very good one; he was shrewd, hard-working, and honourable; and he liked to have that way. Like many another young man, whose intellect, though shrewd, is limited in range, he was prepared to say the last word with authority on every subject presented to his notice; and he had a superior contempt for women. His first impulse on hearing that Templecombe had passed to a mistress had been to resign his position on the estate. But the post was a good one, and after much vituperation of circumstances he had decided to stay on and "see if he could put up with her!" She might be a meek little girl who would be afraid to interfere, he hoped.

The results likely to ensue on the appearance of Valentine, proud, imperious, and moreover starting with one of those



prejudices so hard to eradicate, that an agent was never a gentleman, are easily imagined. Kenneth Gaunt had gone forth from his first interview with the new owner of Templecombe vowing that he would send in his resignation on the very next day. Valentine had repaired to Mrs. Carryl to announce that of all the intolerable beings it had been her misfortune to meet, her agent was the very king, and that she should certainly dismiss him.

Resignation and dismissal, however, alike hung fire. Kenneth Gaunt discovered that it would be sinful to let "that girl" ruin the property, as she would inevitably do, if she was left to herself. Valentine told Mrs. Carryl loftily that "the man" knew his business, although he was personally so offensive. Hostilities on either side had been spirited and unflagging, and Mrs. Carryl, at least, had been quite unprepared to expect a truce—Valentine's words of the afternoon before having only bewildered her—when the combatants electrified her by their peaceful appearance in the drawing-room.

If her power of wonderment had not been already fully occupied by this, she might have found something to surprise her in Valentine's manner—it was a manner which Mrs. Carryl had never seen in her before—as she made a gesture towards the chair she wished Mr. Gaunt to take, and sat down herself, saying:

"Can you tell me anything about the Penroses, Mr. Gaunt? Has Mrs. Penrose decided?"

Kenneth Gaunt would have said, had he been asked, that his presence in Miss Clinton's drawing-room as Miss Clinton's agent was due in part to that toleration of her which his feeling for the welfare of the property rendered necessary, and in part to his determination to hold his own against what he stigmatised as "that girl's intolerable pride." He accommodated himself to the inevitable, and disguised his feelings with a skill which was by no means usual to him, as he took the chair pointed out to him; it was his habit to express himself with the utmost frankness, and to stand to his guns, to himself and to the world at large, with an obstinacy that was not without an inner fibre of genuine, if misapplied, strength.

Her question referred to the family of one of the tenants on the property who had recently died, leaving a widow and several children. Kenneth Gaunt wished that the eldest son, a lad of seventeen,

should try his hand at working the farm; his energetic arguments had overcome the fears of the boy and his mother, and his manner of announcing their decision to Miss Clinton was ringing with the hopefulness with which he had tried to inspire them. Robert Penrose's enthusiasm had been difficult to fire. Miss Clinton's was another matter.

Mrs. Carryl, who had never known a suggestion advanced by either Valentine or Kenneth Gaunt pass uncontradicted by the other, listened in silent amazement as the former responded instantly to his explanations, making common cause with him in arranging for her young tenant. Her sympathy apparently mollified her sworn foe, for Robert Penrose's affairs led to other topics, and he talked and listened during lunch eagerly, if now and then with an involuntary touch of that lordliness natural to him when talking to a woman.

And Valentine never resented his authoritative demeanour. On the contrary, she absolutely consulted him, and yielded to his opinion on more than one occasion. They were in the midst of an animated discussion on horses and riding, Valentine having expressed a wish for a saddle-horse, when she said suddenly:

"I wonder whether you could get me a horse at once, Mr. Gaunt—in the course of a day or two, I mean! Two horses, one for myself and one for a gentleman. My stepfather is coming to stay with me."

Kenneth Gaunt was in the act of laying his dinner napkin on the table, lunch being by this time over. He stopped suddenly, his hand outstretched.

"I beg your pardon," he said blankly.

Valentine laughed.

"The idea of my having a stepfather seems to be quite electrifying!" she said gaily. "I shall begin to find it electrifying myself soon! Mr. Dorrisant is coming to England for the first time for seventeen years. We must show him the country, of course, and it would be a pity not to take the opportunity of having some one to ride with me. You will see about the horses, Mr. Gaunt?"

Perhaps the fact that she was giving an order restored to her voice the imperiousness which had vanished from it; or, perhaps, the mere fact of receiving an order brought back their mutual relations to Kenneth Gaunt's mind; perhaps it was some other cause yet that brought about the change. But his manner altered suddenly, and became stiff and abrupt.

"If you wish it," he said shortly. "Do you wish me to meet Mr. Dorrisant's individual tastes in horseflesh? Will he be with you for long?"

Valentine smiled. She was not thinking now of Kenneth Gaunt, or of his manner, and perhaps the young man was aware of that fact. Something, certainly, enhanced his displeasure.

"I wish I could tell you!" she said. "I hope so! And I wish I could tell you anything about his tastes, either. But I have not seen him since I was four years old. Perhaps you know that my mother died when I was quite a little girl, and I have not seen Mr. Dorrisant since her marriage."

"What is Mr. Dorrisant's profession, may I ask? And where is he coming from?"

As a clue to the expected arrival's taste in horses, which was all that could be said to concern him, the details he demanded were decidedly far-fetched. Kenneth Gaunt had no right whatever to ask for them, and knew that he had no right. It was one of the hot-headed speeches that he was apt to make and to decline to regret. But Valentine had, apparently, no desire to break the peace that had reigned between them, and though she paused, and drew up her head slightly, she answered him simply enough.

"I cannot tell you his profession," she said. "I have never known it. He comes from America."

She rose as she spoke, and Kenneth followed her example, pushing back his chair with a brusque gesture.

"An unknown gentleman, of unknown profession, hailing from America! Pardon me, Miss Clinton, but I imagine that he is known to some of your friends?"

For no discernible reason, Kenneth Gaunt was completely losing his head. A prejudice against Miss Clinton's unknown stepfather had evidently taken sudden possession of him—a prejudice violent as it was absolutely irrational. The introduction of Mr. Dorrisant's name into the conversation had changed its tone certainly, and had undoubtedly relegated Kenneth himself into a secondary position in Miss Clinton's thoughts; but that was, on the surface, no good reason for his filling in the outline presented to him in the worst possible colours.

Valentine turned, her colour heightened, her head very erect.

"I don't——" she began haughtily.

Perhaps her manner exasperated him, but Kenneth interrupted her, and interrupted her rudely.

"Oh, of course it does not concern your agent!" he said. "It was an unpardonable liberty, no doubt. I only wondered what, as a matter of fact, was known of this unknown gentleman."

"My mother married him," returned Valentine very coldly and very proudly.

A moment or two later and he had taken his leave in the fewest possible words, responded to with monosyllabic haughtiness. The harmony of the past hour, the slow growth of inharmonious months, had been wholly destroyed in a few minutes.

### CHAPTER III. THE DAY-DREAM REALISED.

"By the six-thirty, Marion. So they will be here at about seven."

Breakfast was just over at Templecombe, and Valentine was standing by the mantelpiece, her graceful, spirited figure outlined against the background of its dark oak. She was looking very bright, very happy, very charming.

"Shall you go to meet them?" asked Mrs. Carryl.

"Certainly not!" was the decided answer, and then, as a footman appeared in answer to the bell, Valentine added to him: "The waggonette is to meet the six-thirty train at Templecombe this evening. And tell Wilson"—Wilson combined the function of head-footman and butler—"that I shall want to see him in half an hour."

Four days had passed since Valentine had received that first letter from her stepfather. Her answer to it had been followed by a note from Mr. Dorrisant, acknowledging her cordiality with frank dignity, explaining that he had with him a young ward whom he could hardly leave for more than a day or two alone in London, and asking if he might bring the said ward to Templecombe. Valentine's reply had been a ready invitation to the young man, and the evening of the present day was to bring with it the arrival.

The sense that the realization of a long-cherished day-dream is imminent involves a sense of crisis, in which the details of that dream become preternaturally distinct, and wear a freshly exciting aspect.

Valentine, brought so close to what she had so long desired, was conscious of thoughts and feelings rising round it now for the first time. A personal colouring,

which it had wholly lacked as an intangible sentiment in her imagination, suffused itself now over the situation. The personality of the man who was soon to become a reality instead of an ideal for her—the personality for which she had been content to substitute a shadow—had suddenly become of vital interest for her.

It was little wonder that as the morning passed she grew always more restless, and incapable of continued occupation. And at last, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, she announced that she should go for a walk.

"I shall go and see Mrs. Penrose, Marion," she said. "No, you shan't come with me; I don't want you to be tired this evening. You must help me entertain my guests!"

It was a lovely afternoon, and perhaps the sounds and sights about her drew her thoughts to some extent from the subject that had occupied them ever since she had waked that morning, or perhaps some other subject forced itself upon her. For as she came in sight of the farm of which Kenneth Gaunt had had so much to say three days earlier, some of the excitement died out of her eyes. With an involuntary gesture, her always erect little head was drawn more erect still.

She paid the visit she had proposed, talking to Mrs. Penrose and her son with that frank charm which had made her, even in the past six months, adored by her tenantry. Several times during the course of the interview she was assured by the boy, won from his diffidence into something like enthusiasm, that just what she was saying Mr. Gaunt had said. And on each occasion that proud little gesture recurred. And when she finally said good-bye, and turned into the road alone, her sensitive face settled into an expression which might have been described as wistful but for the proud lines about the mouth.

She walked on swiftly, and she had just come to a place where the road was met and joined by another, when she started, and a flush of colour came into her cheeks. Along the other road, so that their ways must inevitably converge, was coming Kenneth Gaunt himself.

He saw her at the same instant and flushed hotly; all the more hotly because he felt his colour rise, and it made him furious. He hesitated for an instant, and then, lifting his hat, he was about to shoot on ahead when Valentine said:

"Good afternoon, Mr. Gaunt. I want to speak to you about Robert Penrose."

It was the first time they had met since the day when he had lunched at the Hall, and Valentine's tone was very haughty. But something about her made of it the haughtiness of offence, which is a very different thing from innate haughtiness of temper, and which implies the existence of some feeling to be offended.

Kenneth stopped perforce. Being a gentleman, he was quite aware that he had put himself utterly in the wrong on their last interview, and that Miss Clinton's offence was just; being a singularly head-strong young man, to have put himself in the wrong led with him to a practical assertion that wrong was right, by means of a dogged refusal to acknowledge it as wrong. His mental attitude at the moment was one of great indignation with Miss Clinton. And about his resentment, as about hate, utterly as he would have scouted the idea, there was that which implied in its very heat the previous existence between them of some kind of unconscious sympathy.

Having signified as briefly as possible that he was at her service, Kenneth listened to what Valentine had to say—neither of them recognised the fact that it was of no immediate importance—with an air of dignified reserve; replying with a tacit assumption of an immeasurable gulf dividing them as mistress and man, which was ludicrously out of keeping with his expression of unapproachable offence. Nothing ludicrous struck Valentine. On the contrary, she began to wonder whether she herself might not be really to blame, her pride and her common sense alike struggling the while with the wonder. Under the influence of these conflicting emotions, having disposed of young Penrose, she offered a remark about the weather, uttered with a mingled defiance and hauteur. Kenneth Gaunt allowed the majesty of his demeanour to be slightly softened as he answered her, and they proceeded to discuss the climatic probabilities with a haughtiness on either side which, taken in conjunction with the subject of their discourse, was not without its comic element. The weather, however, was disposed of, and a pause ensued. Then Valentine, with her head very erect, observed, apropos of nothing:

"I am expecting Mr. Dorrisant this evening!"

If she had said in so many words, "I am expecting an apology from you," she could not have expressed that meaning more clearly than did the tones of her voice.

Nor could a more complete denial of a right on her part to such an apology have been conveyed in a volume than was conveyed by Kenneth as he answered loftily:

"Indeed!"

"He is bringing his ward with him, Mr. Geoffrey Cary," remarked Miss Clinton. Her cheeks were rather pinker than usual.

"Indeed!"

A sudden and violent reaction against her doubts of her own attitude; a sudden and violent resentment against what she called "his abominable attempt at putting her in the wrong"; took possession of Valentine.

"I am sorry that I can give you no more information about Mr. Geoffrey Cary than I can about his guardian!" she said, suddenly turning a shining pair of eyes on him. "I imagine that you will hardly care to make his acquaintance under such circumstances!"

In the sudden flash of genuine temper all details vanished for her, and she forgot that he was her agent, and only saw in him a man. Her oblivion created oblivion in him. He forgot that there was not necessarily any question of his making the acquaintance of his employer's guests; he forgot that Miss Clinton was his employer. She became for him simply the other party in a quarrel, who had lost her temper, and had thus given him the advantage which had hitherto been all on her side. He was more than willing to take up the glove thus thrown down.

"Since you ask me, I must say that I should not," he answered with a heat as sudden as her own. It was the outlet for much that he could not possibly have defined. If any one had told Kenneth Gaunt that the source of the temper which had risen in him so suddenly and unaccountably three days before was to be found in jealousy, he would have laughed the suggestion to scorn. "I certainly prefer to know something of a man before I make his acquaintance," he added very hotly.

"Is it not enough to know that Mr. Dorrisant is my relation?"

An impetuous young queen might have spoken much as Valentine asked this question. But Kenneth, impervious to the fire with which she spoke, seized instantly on the weak point in her reasoning.

"He is not your relation," he answered promptly. "There isn't even between you the pseudo relationship of long

familiarity. As a matter of fact, he and his ward are no more to you than any other total strangers. You are receiving them without credentials of any kind—taking them entirely on trust—and, pardon me, that's a thing no one but a woman would think of doing."

The words were spoken at random, and Kenneth himself did not believe them at the bottom of his heart. They were nothing but another flash of unreasonable and uncontrollable temper. But to Valentine they were an intolerable outrage.

"You are really too polite, Mr. Gaunt," she said proudly. "Perhaps when you know a little more of women you will understand that the credentials they value most are those that men, I suppose, are unable to appreciate. My mother's love and trust are Mr. Dorrisant's credentials."

She turned from him as she spoke, and moved away along the road. If she had looked back she would have seen Kenneth Gaunt turn in the opposite direction and walk off in a headlong fashion, as though he neither knew nor cared, in his anger, where he was going.

But Valentine did not look back. With her heart beating high with passionate indignation, she walked rapidly on towards Templecombe. Her most sacred sentiments had been outraged, and the result was to raise round them all her impetuosity in a very tempest of adhesion. With every mental fibre in burning revolt against Kenneth Gaunt, and drawn, as a necessary converse, towards her expected guest, she reached home, and went down to the drawing-room, looking in the clash and glow of her emotion so wonderfully full of spirit and life, that her beauty struck Mrs. Carryl with a vague surprise.

"They will be here directly, I suppose," said the latter.

But even as she spoke Valentine turned and silenced her with a gesture, standing in the middle of the room listening intently. There was a sound as of arrival at the great door; steps across the hall; and then the footman announced:

"Mr. Dorrisant; Mr. Geoffrey Cary."

Valentine saw a tall man enter the room; saw a face which was at once familiar and unfamiliar. She moved towards him with gracious, graceful dignity and welcome in her movement.

"I am very glad to see you," she said simply.

And her day-dream was a dream no longer.



## CHAPTER IV. MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

THE lamps were lighted in the drawing-room; the curtains were drawn, and in the large fireplace a fire sparkled brightly. By the fire, in her favourite chair, sat Mrs. Carryl, working faithfully at her lace. At the other end of the room Valentine was seated at the piano. Her dinner dress was handsome and very becoming; but with that light on her face she would have looked lovely in anything.

Dinner was just over. The travellers' arrival had been succeeded almost immediately by the ringing of the dressing-bell; and the constraint of the first meeting had lasted only a few moments. It had been followed by an interval, during which Valentine had dressed, amid a hazy, feverish tumult of impression, expectation, and emotion. Then had come dinner, with its necessarily distant and ceremonial tone, and now, with the appearance of her guests in the drawing-room, Valentine was looking forward to that first tête-à-tête, which was to be the fulfilment of so much.

She had answered Mrs. Carryl's timidly enthusiastic comments on Mr. Dorrisant almost absently; she had strolled aimlessly about the room, finally seating herself at the piano, playing chords and scraps of melody, her eyes fixed always on the door. It opened at last, and her lips curved into a smile of welcome.

The two who came in were specimens of two distinct phases of manhood. The younger was, apparently, a boy, though, as a matter of fact, Geoffrey Cary was twenty-four. He had fair hair and a good-looking face, lighted by pleasant eyes; he was slight and evidently hardly fully developed in build. All the most salient features about his prepossessing appearance, indeed, were eloquent of youth, in contradistinction to the manhood—using the word in its more restricted sense—of the figure whose hand rested on his shoulder. Mark Dorrisant was singularly handsome. He was tall and distinguished in bearing, with an excellent figure and carriage. His hair was iron-grey at the temples, and a long iron-grey moustache hid his mouth. The firm, broad chin and the clear-cut jaw were very strong and good; the nose was aquiline, and perhaps a trifle too thin; but the charm of the face lay in the eyes. They were dark blue and singularly beautiful, with an unusually kind, direct gaze. They turned towards Valentine as their owner entered the room, and came

towards her, pushing the boy good-humouredly before him.

"This fellow wants to know," he said, "what relationship there would be between you and himself if he were really my son, instead of being my son by adoption only."

The tone in which he asked the question—kindly, and with a subtle acknowledgement of, but no insistence on, the bond between himself and Valentine—created, as if by magic, that sympathetic atmosphere for which she had been waiting. The smile deepened in her eyes, and then she turned them on the boy.

"We should be stepbrother and sister, shouldn't we?" she said happily.

Geoffrey Cary must needs have been an obtrusively disagreeable specimen of his kind, to have dissipated her prejudice in his favour. She accepted him at once with that frank confidence which was characteristic of her, for the sake of his guardian.

"I suppose we should," answered the boy eagerly. "It would have been awfully jolly."

Mark Dorrisant echoed Valentine's light laugh indulgently.

"You've had hard luck in the family line, haven't you, my boy?" he said. "It seems a shame, considering how overstocked some people are in the matter of relations, that others should have so few."

He patted the boy on the shoulder as he spoke, and perhaps his touch conveyed a hint which the boy's gentlemanly instinct was quick to understand. With a light-hearted assertion that "some fellows had all the luck," Geoffrey Cary turned, and, crossing the room, he sat down by Mrs. Carryl, and plunged into a confiding, boyish description of his own loneliness as far as relations were concerned; a description which so enchained Mrs. Carryl that, as she afterwards told Valentine: "I couldn't do any work. I was so wishing I was poor Mr. Cary's mother."

Valentine had not risen from the piano, and as his ward moved away Mark Dorrisant commented lightly on the music lying about. Valentine answered vaguely; her interest was all preoccupied. The position in which she found herself was so like, and so strangely unlike, what she had expected it to be. The sense of vivid personal interest, which had been growing in her all day, was consummated in her actual contact with the personality of the man before her. He was no longer a focus for sentiment, a link with the past in her

mind. He was a reality, an as yet unknown reality, and what he might prove on acquaintance was of the utmost individual moment to her.

He glanced at her now as she answered him, and then quietly took a chair facing her as she sat looking down at the keyboard; leaning back he fixed his eyes full on her face. There was a silence, and Valentine, as if conscious of his gaze, flushed slightly. At last he said gently:

"You are very like your mother."

Valentine started, and the colour rushed to her face in a flood, as she leant towards him, and said eagerly:

"Oh, do you think so? Do I remind you of her? I am so very glad. Auntie used to say that she did not think me like her."

"Your aunt knew you—your individuality. To me, at present, you are only your mother's child. Yes, I think you very like her."

"I am very glad."

She met his eyes again, her own soft with emotion, and then, in her respect for his share in the loss which was their common sorrow, she dropped them. Mark Dorrisant, however, took no advantage of her consideration; his gaze was fixed on her face until she lifted her head with a pretty characteristic gesture, imperious in its very graciousness, and said:

"I cannot tell you how pleased I am to see you here; to meet you at last. I have wished it very much."

"I have wished it, too," he answered instantly. "I have hoped often to have brought it about long before this. When I gave you up to your aunt as a little child"—he smiled at the figure before him in its girlish stateliness, and the smile and her response in kind seemed to bring them very near together—"I gave you up completely, as no doubt you have understood. As the world counts such, we have no shadow of a claim on one another—you and I! But there are ties that are not to be disposed of so summarily, are there not? You and I have too much in common. We must meet too often in the region of memory to be strangers in our hearts."

He had spoken very quietly, with no suspicion of sentimentality about his dignified manner. His eyes were fixed absently on distance as though he were uttering such simple matters of fact that her assent was a foregone conclusion.

And then, suddenly, Mark Dorrisant

turned to her with a cheery gesture of confidence and friendliness, and said frankly:

"So we stand on rather curious terms, don't we? Nothing but ideas to one another if we choose; a good deal to one another, perhaps, again if we choose. The first thing to be done, evidently, is to make one another's acquaintance."

He looked her full in the face as he spoke with a smile, and in his eyes for the first time there was undisguised curiosity—the curiosity which is a tribute rather than an affront. His words and his manner alike conveyed a tacit acknowledgement of her rights in the matter; a certain subtle homage to her womanhood, which was not without its effect on Valentine, little as she understood it. She smiled back at him, and there was a touch of condescension in her voice, quite irresistible in conjunction with its girlish tones and the impulsiveness with which she spoke, as she said:

"That is what I should like. You are in no hurry to go back to town, I hope? Are you in England for long? Do you know, I know absurdly little about you"—her face clouded slightly as she spoke, and the gaiety of her tone was, perhaps, a little forced—"I don't know where you live or what you do. Some day you must tell me all about yourself."

"Some day," he answered. "For the present, will my plans for the immediate future answer the purpose? I am in England, as a matter of fact, mainly in my capacity of guardian to that boy." With a slight gesture he indicated Geoffrey Cary, who was still talking to Mrs. Carryl. "His father was a dear friend of mine in Australia, enormously rich and singularly lonely. He left a fortune for Geoff in trust with me, and I undertook to bring the boy home and establish him in England. He is to come of age in the winter, when he will be three-and-twenty, and until his affairs are settled I have no plans of my own."

"I see," said Valentine. "Then you will be in London for another year at least. I am so glad. But I did not know you had lived in Australia."

"I have travelled a good deal," Dorrisant answered. "Yes, I shall be in England for another year at least—possibly longer. To settle a boy into a career in England isn't such a simple matter as poor Cary imagined."

He looked to her for sympathy—a landmark in their progress at which they had arrived by such natural and imperceptible degrees, that Valentine hardly realised

how far they had gone as she responded to his look.

"What kind of career?" she asked interestedly.

"Cary himself had some idea of Parliament and so forth. Geoff's own ideas are hardly solidified yet. He is a good fellow and a clever, though. It is very kind of you to let me bring him here."

"I am very glad to have him," returned Valentine impulsively.

"I shall be very glad for him to know you," said Geoff's guardian with a smile. "You are his first specimen of an English lady, do you know? If you will be kind to him I shall be very grateful. He is rather lonely."

"I am lonely, too," said Valentine, smiling also as she rose from her seat. "We ought to be friends." She paused a moment, facing Mark Dorrisant as he, too, rose. He was the taller of the two, of course, but in her pretty stateliness they stood on not unequal ground. She looked him full in the face for a moment, and then she held out her hand as if involuntarily, and said: "Perhaps I shall not be so lonely now."

He took her hand and held it.

"Take care," he said, smiling—and the warning was more convincing than torrents of protestation—"take care! Perhaps, after all, we shall not like one another."

"I think we shall," said Valentine. And then she led the way towards the fireplace.

"Marion," she said brightly, "what must we do to entertain our visitors to-morrow? I suppose the first thing to be done is to take them over the place, and then they will know its resources."

"It is a very large property, is it not?" said Mark Dorrisant carelessly. "You don't manage it yourself, I imagine? Have you an agent?"

Quite suddenly, as though the words brought back to her the scene of the afternoon, a wave of burning colour rushed over Valentine's face, dyeing her very throat crimson. Neither Mrs. Carryl nor Geoffrey Cary chanced to be looking at her, but Mark Dorrisant's eyes were upon her, and they were on her still as she bent her head suddenly over a bowl of flowers.

"Yes," she answered briefly.

#### CHAPTER V.

#### QUEEN VALENTINE'S KINGDOM.

"No, no, Geoffrey! Partridges on the first of September and grouse on the

twelfth of August. That's most important!"

It was a lovely May morning. On the lawn that led down to the park gates Valentine and Geoffrey Cary were sauntering up and down together, apparently waiting for something or some one.

Little more than a week had passed since Mark Dorrisant and his ward arrived at Templecombe, but that week had been wet, and a week of bad weather has much the same effect upon a party shut up in a country house as the same period of time spent upon a yacht is popularly supposed to have. With Geoffrey Cary Valentine was already on those semi-fraternal terms which are so pleasant an imitation of the real thing; treating him as though he were immeasurably her junior, receiving plenty of boyish devotion and giving in return—and giving it gladly in right of his position with regard to Mark Dorrisant—an impulsive liking which grew rapidly.

For all his superficial air of conventional good breeding, young Cary's knowledge of manners and customs essentially English was by no means complete, and it was an eager and totally unsuccessful attempt on his part to demonstrate to Valentine his acquaintance with the ways of English sport that had produced her laughing correction. He laughed, too, buoyantly.

"All right," he said, "I'll remember if I can. But it's awfully confusing, when one is used to shooting everything everywhere, always! It seems a simpler plan, too, on the whole, don't you think?" he added, laughing. "I'll get these things up, though. You'll help me?"

"Of course I will," she said, echoing his laugh. "It's not the most difficult thing you'll have to get up, Geoff, I think."

The boyish face looked suddenly more serious.

"No," he said. "If I go into Parliament—"

He broke off suddenly as their sauntering steps turned towards the house.

"There they are," he exclaimed.

Mrs. Carryl and Mark Dorrisant were coming towards them.

The tour of the estate, of which Valentine had spoken on that first evening, had not yet been accomplished. Apparently by the morning after she had proposed it, it had ceased to find favour in Valentine's eyes, for even when the weather did allow of their going out, she always had something to suggest in preference to a

walk about the grounds. To-day, however, she had come down to breakfast full of a proposal that they should take advantage of the lovely morning and go for a long walk across the park and round the home woods. They must go to-day, it had appeared. She wanted to see how the new cottages were getting on, and no other day would, or could, suit so well.

Templecombe was her kingdom; she reigned therein, princess in her own right. In this instance, as in every other, her proposition was adopted with degrees and styles of acclamation varying with the individual temperament of the acclamer.

"We've walked miles already," called out Geoffrey exultantly, as the newcomers drew near. "Isn't it a jolly morning?"

"Lovely," responded Mark Dorrisant, looking about him admiringly. "We could hardly have a better morning for inspecting your kingdom, Queen Valentine."

The smile and the gesture with which she turned to him; the very look with which their eyes met, for all its easy absence of constraint; told that the intimacy between them was by no means at so advanced a stage as the intimacy between Valentine and Geoffrey Cary. The cordiality between Valentine and her stepfather went deeper and meant more. Affection between them involved too much to be rushed at or lightly indulged. It was growing in Valentine day by day—growing all the more steadily and surely in that Mark Dorrisant never by word or look betrayed any expectation or made any demand. If the terms on which they stood to one another were strange, his demeanour made them no less delightful.

She smiled into his eyes now, and acknowledged the title bestowed upon her with a little bend of her head, as she answered gaily:

"I hope my domain will meet with your approval," and, turning, led the way towards the park gate.

The spirit of the bright spring morning seemed to be in her blood as well as in young Cary's. There was a vivid animation about her face and carriage that was not absolutely natural to her, and suggested something like excitement or nervous tension.

They passed out into the park, Valentine leading the way with Mark Dorrisant, Mrs. Carryl and Geoffrey—a not very well assorted pair—following, and for the first mile the conversation consisted

of two duologues. Valentine was full of gay talk and laughter; explaining the country round to her companion, telling him of her plans for the estate, asking his advice, and speaking frequently of "my agent, Mr. Gaunt." Mark Dorrisant was full of quiet interest, sympathetic and sensible, and their conversation had shown no signs of flagging, when, becoming gradually conscious that the talk behind them was less flourishing, Valentine, slackening her steps, made the conversation general. They were out of the park by this time, and their road skirted a gentle slope to the sheltered field which was the site of the new cottages. These new cottages had been a hobby with Valentine ever since she had come to Templecombe, and as they drew near the spot now she waxed quite eloquent upon the subject.

"I don't suppose there is much to see yet," she said finally; "but I hope they may have made a beginning. Oh, yes!" she continued delightedly, "they are really at work. How——"

She stopped suddenly. They were just turning in at what had once been the field gate, and before them on the rough track stood Kenneth Gaunt. He had evidently stopped abruptly on hearing her voice, but retreat was impossible for him. They were face to face.

For the moment, simple as the situation seemed, all Valentine's presence of mind seemed to forsake her. Perhaps she had had reason to believe that business would take her agent into the neighbouring town on that particular morning, and perhaps, consequently, it was sheer surprise that sent that crimson flood of colour over her cheeks. For an instant she hesitated. Then Kenneth, lifting his hat distantly, stepped off the track. The colour died out of her face; her delicate lips set themselves into a line of icy disdain; and acknowledging his salutation with the slightest possible bow, she passed him without a word or a glance. It was the first time they had met since the day of Mark Dorrisant's arrival.

"Who was that young man?"

Mark Dorrisant had dropped back, leaving Valentine to Geoffrey—to the young man's delight—and he put the question carelessly to Mrs. Carryl. Mrs. Carryl was quite as pleased at the change of partners as Geoffrey could be; the kindly courtesy of the man had won her heart during the past week, while the



boyish spirit which rose higher in Geoffrey, as he became familiar and at ease at Templecombe, rather startled her; and her desire to keep Mark Dorrisant by her, if anything so deprecating may be characterised as desire, made her quite loquacious.

"That is Mr. Gaunt," she said, "the agent. He is a horrid young man, Mr. Dorrisant, rude and overbearing, and everything dreadful." Then the correction she had received from Valentine—nearly a fortnight ago now—recurring to her mind, she added hastily and confusedly: "At least, Valentine used to think so, but I believe she doesn't now."

The walk home was a silent one. Valentine was apparently tired, for she spoke little, walking by Geoffrey's side, and letting him entertain her with a dissertation on a fiery bay mare he had broken in in Australia. She had contributed little to the conversation at luncheon when, that meal being over, Mark Dorrisant came up to her as she stood looking rather listlessly out of window. He and she were alone together in the room, and he said, with a smile:

"All pleasant things come to an end, unfortunately. I am going to bring that fact forcibly home to Geoff by writing to our people in London to expect us on Friday." Then, as she started and turned to him quickly, he added: "We came for a week, you know."

"You will stay longer than that, I hope," cried Valentine impulsively. She seemed with the words to light up curiously, as though they involved some heat of feeling other than appeared on the surface. "You are not absolutely obliged to go so soon?"

"Not absolutely obliged, perhaps," began Mark Dorrisant slowly, his eyes upon the pretty, flushed face.

"Then stay," she said impetuously, stretching out both her hands to him. "Don't go away just when we are beginning to know one another. You said we might be so much to one another if we chose, and I think we do choose. I wanted to like you for my mother's sake. I want you to like me now on your own account, as well as on hers. I haven't any one belonging to me, and—I think she would be pleased."

She had spoken rapidly, with an unreserved advance which she had never shown to him before, and which expressed itself now with a vehemence, strangely touched with defiance—defiance of herself

or of somebody else. Tears stood in her eyes and choked her voice as she finished, and her face was pale and quivering. Mark Dorrisant looked at her for a moment more, holding her hands in his, his eyes deep and tender. Then he said gravely:

"I think she would."

He pressed her hands gently, and as he released them she turned and went swiftly out of the room. Valentine was crying.

The question of Mark Dorrisant's departure with his ward was tacitly understood to be settled, and the little scene to which it had given rise marked the beginning of a new phase in the relations between Valentine and her stepfather. Valentine's little outburst of emotion was never repeated; but when they met again the manner of each to the other was subtly altered. It was to Valentine as though a period of probation were over. Free now to indulge her impulsive love-loving temperament, having satisfied alike the demands of reason and of her own innate dignity; thrown for the first time with a man older than herself, whose claim upon her affections—while it still remained a claim—was slight enough to make her yielding of them a distinct pleasure to them both; and finding in that man a personality that charmed her, it was not surprising that her affection for Dorrisant grew day by day. It abated not a jot of her imperious wilfulness; indeed, one of her stepfather's charms for her, little as she understood it, lay in his tacit recognition of her independence. But she grew to rely on the thought of his unexacting affection, and his mere presence in her life became a support where any attempt to influence her would have repelled her as a chain.

Six weeks passed by and Mark Dorrisant and his ward were still at Templecombe. Mark Dorrisant made another attempt at bringing their visit to a close, an attempt negatived peremptorily in full family gathering this time. Thereupon he went himself to town for a few days on business, leaving Geoffrey Cary at Templecombe.

It was the morning after his return, and the house party of four, by this time as intimate as though the three principal members had been indeed bound together by ties of relationship, were together in the drawing-room. June had come; the long windows were open, and the room was full of summer scents and sounds. Geoffrey Cary sat on the window-sill, preparing to let himself slip down on to the terrace

below. His guardian was sitting in an attitude of indolent repose, hard by; and standing up between them was Valentine, holding a little jewel-case which Dorrisant had brought her from London. They had been laughing and joking together for the last hour, and even Mrs. Carryl, sitting with her lace-work a little further into the room, was hardly such a poor little shadow as usual. She had a present from London, too.

"Go along by yourself, you restless boy," exclaimed Valentine merrily, looking down at the laughing face turned up to her by Geoffrey, and closing a discussion peremptorily. "Pater isn't coming out yet; are you?" she added, turning to Dorrisant. How it had come about she could not have said; but gradually and almost insensibly to herself, hearing it used so constantly, Valentine had adopted the boy's name for his guardian. Her stepfather, in return, called her almost invariably by an abbreviation of the title he had laughingly given her.

"Queen Val's quite right, Geoff," he said now. "It is cooler here. Be off."

She turned to Geoffrey in laughing triumph, and as she did so the light fell full on her face. It had altered a little in the past six weeks. It was a shade thinner and a shade paler, and the smile on her lips did not touch her eyes. There was a wistful look in them, a look which had grown in them gradually, but which never left them. Her lips were parted to speak when the door was opened by a servant, who spoke to her in a low voice.

"Mr. Gaunt would be glad to speak to you, miss," he said.

Only one pair of eyes noticed the curious momentary stillness that held the girlish figure. Only one pair of ears noticed the hardly perceptible pause before she said:

"Very well, Woods. In the library. Have a nice walk, Geoff," she added over her shoulder, as she moved away, and then, without turning her face again to the group in the window, she left the room. She went slowly across the hall, and opened the library door.

During the past six weeks she had not once seen Kenneth Gaunt. Necessary communications had been made by him in writing; her orders had been given through the same medium.

The constant intercourse of the previous six months, with its battles, and its truces, and its dawning peace, had been absolutely suspended.

Kenneth was standing by the window as she opened the door. He turned quickly, and bowed without speaking. She merely inclined her head, and waited while he produced a paper from his pocket. Both the young faces were pale and set, with lines of unbending haughtiness and indifference.

"I am sorry to trouble you," he said coldly, "but this paper needs a word of explanation before you sign it."

She bent her head again, listened while he gave the explanation, and then signed her name without comment.

"That is all?" she said distantly, as she handed him back the paper.

"Thank you, that is all," he answered in the same tone. "I fear I may have to trouble you on the same subject again next week."

He bowed again and left the room.

Mrs. Carryl was alone in the drawing-room when Valentine returned to it.

"They are both gone out, after all," she explained. "Mr. Dorrisant is so kind, isn't he? He can't bear to say no to Mr. Cary. And there is a note for you, Valentine. A groom from the Chase brought it just now."

Valentine made no answer. She was looking pale and cold in spite of the June sunshine, and she took up the note and began to open it absently. She read it through and then turned and walked to the window, standing there with her back to Mrs. Carryl as the latter said:

"Is it a note about the dinner-party, Valentine? I hope it is not a disappointment."

The dinner-party in question was a large one to be given by Valentine on that day week—an event in the quiet country life at Templecombe.

Valentine did not answer instantly. She was looking vaguely out over the garden.

"Yes," she said at last. "Frank Dane can't come."

"Mr. Dane!" exclaimed Mrs. Carryl. "Oh, how very unfortunate! You must have another man, I suppose. Whom shall you ask?"

"Mr. Gaunt," said Valentine.

Her tone was so conclusive that Mrs. Carryl's amazement was only expressed in her face.

#### CHAPTER VI. HOSTESS AND GUEST.

IN the drawing-room at Templecombe some fifteen people were scattered here

and there. It was within a few minutes of half-past seven, and in the middle of the room, with the sunset light of the June evening full upon her, Valentine was standing.

Perhaps because of the peculiar interest attaching to her, girl as she was, as sole mistress of that great house; perhaps because her manner sat so delightfully upon her girlishness, Valentine never appeared more charming than in the capacity of hostess. To-night, dressed in pale pink silk, with her lovely eyes brighter and her cheeks a shade pinker than usual, and with an added touch of graciousness about her that seemed to come of some undefined excitement, she was irresistible. She was listening prettily to the ponderous compliments of an old gentleman, when the footman announced:

"Mr. Gaunt!" and she turned quickly.

In a formally-worded note Mr. Kenneth Gaunt had accepted Miss Clinton's invitation for June the twenty-first. And why Mr. Kenneth Gaunt had taken that course any one looking attentively at his face as he followed his name into the room would have been puzzled to say. For it was the face of a young man at war with himself and his surroundings, and very thinly concealing his sentiments under a veil of stolid indifference.

"How do you do?" said Miss Clinton, holding out her hand.

"How do you do?" returned her guest. His expression grew a shade more stolid as he shook hands. "I hope I am not late," he added abruptly, his gentlemanly instincts dominating his evident determination to preserve his neutrality by silence.

"Not late, but the last," returned Valentine. "You are to take in Miss Meredith, please. You know her, I know, so I will introduce you to my stepfather, Mr. Dorrisant, before I arrange the rest of the people. You will be at his end of the table."

She turned, and Kenneth followed her perforce across the room. She did not address her stepfather as usual, but touched him lightly with her fan to attract his attention.

"I want to introduce Mr. Gaunt," she said. "Mr. Kenneth Gaunt—Mr. Dorrisant."

And as Mark Dorrisant held out his hand to Kenneth with his pleasantest smile and a cordial "I know you by report already, Mr. Gaunt," she turned to her

duties with a smile and a light on her face.

And the smile and the light remained on her face during dinner. She was too much occupied to glance often at her stepfather's end of the table, and on the few occasions she did do so, Kenneth Gaunt chanced to be hidden from her by the dress and decorations of a large old lady who was his right-hand neighbour.

Had she seen his face the smile might have vanished. But Valentine Clinton had still a great deal to learn, especially on the subject of prejudice.

Templecombe was a musical neighbourhood, and Valentine was in demand not only as hostess but as musician. If she glanced towards Kenneth as he came back into the drawing-room in isolated majesty, she failed to observe in the movement and excitement of the moment that his general demeanour was dangerously suggestive of an overcharged thunder-cloud.

There had been a good deal of music, and she and Geoffrey had sung two duets together when, on the conclusion of the last of these, she laid her hand familiarly on the young man's arm, and said to him, low and rapidly:

"I want to introduce you to Mr. Gaunt. Sing one more song and then come with me."

Geoffrey assented, and a few moments later he was following her down the room to where Kenneth, still in voluntary isolation, was grimly turning over the leaves of a photograph book. For the last twenty minutes his eyes had been riveted to a large, dull photograph of the Colosseum. For the preceding quarter of an hour he had apparently derived solace from a concentrated inspection of a like photograph of the Forum.

"He looks rather blue," murmured Geoffrey boyishly as they approached.

"Perhaps he doesn't care for music," returned Valentine quickly. "You might take him out on the terrace, Geoff, dear, and give him a cigarette. It's getting late." She put her hand once more on his arm to emphasize her request, and drew him on until they reached Kenneth's side. "Mr. Gaunt," she said, still with that touch on Geoffrey's arm, "I want to introduce you to Mr. Cary, Mr. Dorrisant's ward."

Then, hardly waiting while her introduction was acknowledged silently by Kenneth, she moved away, pursued by the tones of Geoffrey's voice as he made his bright and boyish advances.

"I say," he began cordially, "what do you think of a turn outside? It's no end of a nice evening."

There was some more music after that—a song, to which Miss Clinton listened with a strong tendency on the part of her eyes to wander to the end of the room where the two young men were standing—and a piano solo, to which she apparently gave her whole attention. Just before it began, Geoffrey Cary and Kenneth Gaunt disappeared out of the window leading on to the terrace.

The two young men had not reappeared again, and there was a well-pleased light on Valentine's face as she stood once more near the middle of the room receiving the farewells which began to follow one another with increasing rapidity.

"Good-bye. Such a pleasant party. Thank you so much."

The words had been repeated until they suggested a decided want of originality in the speakers. Only one couple still remained—the complimentary old gentleman, who had a great liking for Valentine, and his motherly old wife. They were lingering over their last words, when the curtain over the window was hastily put aside, and Geoffrey Cary appeared, his face flushed and excited. He was followed closely by Kenneth Gaunt.

Evidently too hot to be stopped even by the presence of Valentine's guests, Geoffrey came up to Mark Dorrisant, and spoke in a voice of strong excitement.

"Mr. Dorrisant," he said, "will you have the goodness to confirm my word to Mr. Gaunt? He refuses to take it."

Instinct had made him lower his voice, so that the words were hardly heard by the others in the group. Only to Valentine the unusual formality of his manner of addressing his guardian was audible. But either his tone or some influence from his excitement struck oddly across Mr. and Mrs. Kenyon's farewells. There was an instant's dead silence as Dorrisant, with a quick glance from his ward to Kenneth, laid his hand in restraint on the boy's shoulder, and moved with him across the room. Mr. Kenyon, whose foible it was to know everybody's affairs, fixed an inquisitive eye on the three men standing apart, and began to tell Valentine a long story, evidently with the intention of seeing the affair through. His wife, however, frustrated his intention by saying good-bye immediately.

As they left the room the voices of the

two young men, barely restrained hitherto by the sense of their presence, broke into fierce altercation.

As though with the introduction of Mark Dorrisant into the dispute, he had deliberately abandoned the amount of reserve he had hitherto retained, bent now, evidently, upon indulging his temper to the utmost, Kenneth Gaunt was facing young Cary and his guardian, his head flung up, his features alive with defiance, his eyes blazing. The first words that Valentine heard distinctly were his.

"I shall not take back my words for you or for any man. I told you that I saw no reason for believing any statement of yours. I see no reason now."

Valentine took three or four quick steps and stood beside the group, her face as white and set as those of the two young men were flushed and working. Mark Dorrisant, his grave, unmoved face contrasting sharply with each extreme, made no attempt to interpose. He only watched his stepdaughter.

As Geoffrey turned to her excitedly, she lifted her hand and silenced him peremptorily.

"Be quiet, Geoffrey," she said in a low, vibrating voice. Then turning to Kenneth with a face that but for the flashing eyes might have been a mask of scorn cut in marble, she said in the same tone: "Mr. Gaunt, will you go?"

Without a word, without the slightest change in his expression, throwing at her a glance of fiery defiance, Kenneth walked straight out of the room.

#### CHAPTER VII. WAR TO THE KNIFE.

It was nearly eleven o'clock on the following morning, and Valentine was alone in the library. She was standing by the great writing-table chair, her fingers clenched round its straight back, her face little less pale than it had been on the previous night. She was waiting for Kenneth Gaunt. Exactly at eleven o'clock Kenneth Gaunt was announced.

He followed his name into the room, looking proud, defiant, dogged—if such a word can be applied to so much animation of temper. For an instant, before he bowed, their eyes met in a quick flash that was like a challenge on either side. Then Valentine, taking no notice whatever of his perfunctory salutation, began to speak. Her voice was low and tense, as though she controlled it with difficulty. Her slender



figure was held like that of a young queen, and the hold of her fingers on the back of the chair tightened.

"I sent for you," she said haughtily, "to say what no doubt you expect me to say. I no longer require your services as my agent. Three months' notice is, I believe, the usual thing. I give you such notice now."

"Very well," he returned defiantly. "As you say, it is what I expected."

Each had spoken to the other without any title—a recognition each of the other's personality which seemed to sweep away all surface conventionalities and bring them face to face, angry man and angry woman. As Kenneth finished speaking, Valentine took an involuntary step round her chair, with an impulsive, passionate gesture. The crust of ice over the fire was very thin; there were fissures in it already through which the glow could be seen.

"May I ask if you are prepared to apologise to Mr. Cary for your conduct last night?"

"No, I am not," returned Kenneth promptly, in a tone and manner which seemed to bring him more into the open field, daring and drawing out the fire.

"Are you prepared to apologise to me?"—she paused a moment, and Kenneth hesitated—"for your insult to him?"

"No."

Point-blank the negative came, and it tore away every shred of reservation from Kenneth's mental attitude. And as though her recognition of it was as gunpowder sprinkled on her fire, the thin crust of ice gave way. She confronted him, her delicate face white with indignation, her fingers tearing into shreds the handkerchief they held.

"You have behaved abominably—abominably!" she said, not raising her voice but speaking with such intensity that it seemed as though long pent-up emotions were at length finding a vent. "From the very first moment of my coming here you have thwarted and insulted me; you were rude and overbearing from the very first. I might have known—oh, I might have known that my first instinct was the true one. I had better have sent you away at once; but I got used to you, I began to think it might be only your manner; your manner!"

She laughed scornfully, and Kenneth, his face a dull red from brow to chin, took up the word hotly.

"My manner!" he cried. "What kind

of manner, in Heaven's name, do you expect from a man whom you treat as though he were the dirt beneath your feet? Sent me away! What do you think would have kept me here so long to be pestered and ordered about by a girl, but some sort of fool's consideration for the property?"

Valentine took no notice of his words, unless the curl of her lips and the added fire of her manner might be so construed.

"From the moment when I spoke to you first of my stepfather you chose to treat the subject contemptuously, with what conceivable excuse it is for you to say—if you can. I gave you the opportunity of apologising; you used it in your own peculiar fashion. Thinking that a personal acquaintance with Mr. Dorrisant and Mr. Cary might bring you to your senses, I asked you to my house last night, and introduced you to them. You honour my introduction by insulting my adopted brother!"

She flung the word at him worked up to a white heat of passion, drawn up to her full height, her face magnificent in its scorn and its denunciation.

She had put the case—as far as words went—justly, even moderately; there was no point in her words which he could impugn. In the wrong from first to last, incapable of defining his motives even to himself, and utterly without excuse, Kenneth, goaded, without knowing why, utterly beyond endurance, seized upon the only relief which presented itself—released the ungovernable fury that had been growing in him with every biting word she spoke.

"Adopted brother!" he said. "It's a pretty fiction, and we all know what it's worth. Adopted brothers are to be had for the asking from the Colonies by any heiress. As for insult, that's as you take it. If it's an insult to speak the truth to Mr. Cary—yes, I did insult him, and I'd do it again. I told him I saw no reason why I should take his word for anything. It's the truth; there is no reason. One takes a gentleman's word, certainly, but one requires first to know that he is a gentleman. I know nothing of Mr. Cary; I've seen nothing of him that I like. The only thing I do know about him is that I wish he'd been shot before he came here; and he'd better look out for himself next time I come across him!"

He stopped abruptly, panting fiercely for breath, defiance standing out in every feature, and for a moment the two young

faces, curiously similar in the fiery emotion of the moment, confronted one another in an eloquent silence.

Then Valentine, as though all her passion were culminating in its utterance, said to him one word: "Go!"

And, as he had done on the previous evening, Kenneth turned and went.

#### CHAPTER VIII. MR. GAUNT'S GUN.

IT had been oppressively hot all day. The heat had given her a headache, Valentine said when she reappeared at luncheon, having been seen by no one since her interview with Kenneth Gaunt; and the sultry atmosphere had been an all-sufficient reason for her colourlessness.

And now, at nine o'clock in the evening, the storm was still in abeyance, but the signs of its approach were accentuated. A heaviness lay over everything. The sky was completely covered by lowering clouds. It was nearly dark, though the legitimate darkness of the June night was an hour off at least.

In spite of the darkness and the stillness, a slight, lovely figure against the setting afforded by the great silent house, and the wide stretch of hardly distinguishable gardens and park, Valentine was walking up and down the terrace in front of the drawing-room windows. She had come out there after dinner, and had seated herself with a book in an attitude of concentration which suggested a set purpose of fixing her mind upon the words before her. She had been alone then as she was alone now. Mrs. Carryl had succumbed to the electricity in the atmosphere.

"I can't bear to see lightning," she had explained, with a helplessly pathetic intonation in her voice that seemed almost to suggest that she expected some one to volunteer personally to ward off the coming storm for her. No one apparently being prepared to arrange this consummation, she had added, still more pathetically, that she felt "safer" in bed, and had thereupon been practically "put to bed" by Valentine before dinner.

Geoffrey Cary had started directly after breakfast on a fishing expedition in which he had arranged to join one of the guests of the previous evening, and had not put in an appearance at dinner-time. Valentine and her stepfather had had dinner together, and then Mark Dorrisant had spoken of taking a stroll in what could only by courtesy be called the cool of the evening.

It had grown darker and darker, and still Valentine had sat in that concentrated attitude, her eyes fixed on her book, apparently unconscious that she could no longer see to read it. At last, with an impulsive movement, she had risen, letting the book fall unheeded at her feet, and had begun to walk restlessly up and down the terrace, her hands clenched together, her face pale and set as it had been, when in repose, all day. She had been walking now for nearly half an hour, and her thoughts must have been far away from her actual surroundings, for she never noticed a figure coming towards the house through the gloom, and as a voice behind her spoke her name she started violently, turning with white parted lips and dilated eyes to find herself face to face with her stepfather.

"Oh!" she gasped, with a little hysterical laugh, "you frightened me, Pater! I didn't hear you!"

Their faces were only very indistinctly visible, but as if noticing the tremulousness of her voice, Mark Dorrisant stretched out his hand, and laid it on her arm.

"Nervous, Queen Val?" he said gently. "What are you doing out here in the dark? Suppose we go into the drawing-room?"

"Is Geoffrey in yet?" Dorrisant continued, as they passed through the window into the drawing-room together. It was lighted, as yet, only at one end; and the sharp circles of light made by the two shaded lamps seemed only to emphasize the shadows around. Valentine sank into an arm-chair close to one of the lamps, and let herself fall back, as if all at once sensible of great weariness.

"No," she said listlessly, "not yet."

Dorrisant was in the act of wheeling up a chair. He stopped, and looked at Valentine.

"It's getting late," he said, "very late. Surely he could have been in by this time."

There was something slightly unusual in his full, even voice; and Valentine's listlessness was penetrated by it. She raised herself in her chair and faced Dorrisant, who was still standing.

"Are you anxious, Pater?" she said lightly. "I think there is no need. He must have gone to dine with the Davidsons. I should scarcely expect him for another hour."

"Yes," answered Dorrisant slowly. "But the storm will be heavy when it comes."

He sat down as he spoke, and as he had placed his chair, Valentine could no longer see his full face.

She sat, her head thrown back against the cushions, dreamily watching his profile, with a soft light in her eyes.

"You are very fond of Geoff?" she said in a sympathetic tone.

There was a moment's pause; and then he spoke almost hastily, and very emphatically.

"Yes," he said, "I am. And it is an immense satisfaction to me, among the many satisfactions the past two months have brought me"—there was an inflection in his voice that made his words a graceful compliment—"that you have grown fond of him, too. Poor Geoff! It will be a bad day for him when I am obliged to issue marching orders."

"You are not thinking of that yet?"

Valentine's voice was low and pleading. He looked round at her intently for a moment, as the lamplight, which threw a shadow on his face, fell full on hers, and then changing his tone, he spoke seriously, and as one who wishes to produce an understanding.

"I shall be obliged to think of it before long," he said, "little as I like the thought. The state of the case, you see, is this. On the twelfth of next February, Geoffrey, as you know, comes of age, his fortune passes into his own hands, and he must make some sort of start in life. Now, if he is to make that start in London, as his father wished, it is obviously my duty as his guardian to show him something of London life and of English life altogether before the time comes when he must make his choice."

He paused, and Valentine said anxiously:

"Yes?"

"So, even if it were otherwise possible," he continued, smiling at her kindly, "that he and I should remain at Templecombe for an indefinite period, Geoff's duty to his father and to the position before him, and my duty as Geoff's guardian—the everlasting yea and nay of this work-a-day world, Queen Val, must drive us away."

He paused again, but this time Valentine did not speak. She had turned her face away, and was gazing steadily out into the night. In the silence there was a low growl of distant thunder, but neither Valentine nor her stepfather seemed to notice it. At last she said in a very low voice:

"I shall miss you."

Four simple words, but the tone in which

she spoke them made them more pathetic than any speech.

"We shall miss you," answered Dorrisant gently.

There was another silence, and another growl of thunder, and then she said:

"What are your plans?"

"I propose," said Dorrisant, leaning forward and speaking clearly and readily like a man whose self-communings on the subject were over, "I propose to take the boy to visit the principal industrial and social centres throughout England, Scotland, and Wales, and to take him also to Ireland. I have any quantity of introductions all over the country, and I have come to the conclusion that this will be the most effectual way of putting him in touch with the spirit of the times in this country. Then, in October, say, I propose to settle with him in town, go into society, and show him everything there is to be shown."

"I see," said Valentine in the same low voice. "You are right, of course. Ah!"

The last exclamation was a sharp, terrified cry; she clasped her hands suddenly over her eyes, as a splendid shaft of forked lightning sprang out of the clouds, and apparently buried itself in the earth just outside the window. Her voice was drowned in a terrific peal of thunder, and as its echoes died away Mark Dorrisant, who had sprang to shut the window, turned to her, his face white and agitated.

"That boy!" he cried. "That boy!"

His voice had hardly died away when there was another rattling peal of thunder, and mingling with it the clamour of the heavy door-bell violently pulled.

"There he is!" cried Valentine. "Ah, how wet he must be! Look at the rain!"

She hastened across the room, and threw open the door just as the front door, hidden from her sight by an angle in the wall, was opened by the footman. But the panting, dripping, laughing figure she expected to see burst into the hall did not appear.

Instead, there was a muffled sound as of the tread of several men, the murmur of voices; and shaken by the thunder, dismayed suddenly without knowing why, Valentine shrank back upon Mark Dorrisant as he came towards her.

"It isn't Geoff," she whispered fearfully.

"Oh, Pater, what is it?"

At that moment, round the angle of the wall, there came rapidly and decidedly a

man, and as she saw his face a low cry of apprehension broke from Valentine, and her stepfather put a reassuring arm about her, his own face white to the lips. It was the village doctor, and as he saw the two in the doorway he stopped short. Recovering instantly, however, he came quickly towards them.

"Miss Clinton," he said, "I am sorry to say there has been an accident. Young Mr. Cary—" He hesitated, and glanced at Mark Dorrisant. "Mr. Dorrisant," he continued, "it's a poor business trying to make bad news good! I'm afraid the poor young fellow is badly hurt."

"Lightning?" Only the one word came from Mark Dorrisant's ashen lips, but he tightened his hold on Valentine as though his instinct was to support her.

"No," returned the other briefly. "He is shot—"

He was interrupted. With a low shriek of unutterable horror Valentine released herself from Mark Dorrisant's arm, and confronted the doctor, her hands outstretched as though to keep off something too terrible to be borne, her face quivering.

"No!" she cried. "No, no! Not that! Not that! It isn't possible! He couldn't! He couldn't!"

There was an instant's pause of blank astonishment on the doctor's part, and then he said soothingly:

"My dear Miss Clinton, pray calm yourself. Mr. Cary's gun was lying by him; it must, of course, have gone off accidentally!"

"Mr. Cary's gun?" exclaimed Mark Dorrisant hoarsely. "He had no gun with him! What do you mean?"

Round the corner at that moment, as if in terrible answer to his question, there came a dreadful little procession, four men carrying between them something still and straight. Behind them came a fifth man carrying a gun, and towards him, hardly seeming to notice the sad burden that came first, Valentine rushed.

"The gun!" she cried. "The gun! Whose is it? Whose is it?"

"It must have been lent to the poor young gentleman, miss," answered the man, looking at her with wondering eyes. "It's Mr. Gaunt's gun, miss, as far as that goes. It's got his name on it."

There was a low, moaning cry, a slender figure swaying helplessly to and fro; and then, as her stepfather and the doctor started simultaneously towards her, Valentine sank insensible at their feet.

#### CHAPTER IX. ON SUSPICION.

"THEN just you tell Mr. Dorrisant that I am most anxious to see him for a few minutes—most anxious. Dear! dear! Shocking affair, to be sure!"

There was a strange hush about the house, and the speaker had lowered his voice instinctively. The footman responded in an equally low tone and led the way to the drawing-room. The drawing-room was empty; there was about it that intangible something that says so plainly that the even tenor of ordinary life is arrested. Left alone, the visitor walked across to the window murmuring again: "Dear! dear! dear!" He had waited only a few minutes when the door opened, and Mark Dorrisant entered the room.

"My dear Mr. Dorrisant," he began, hurrying across the room, and speaking in a tone in which excitement and sympathy were curiously blended, "my dear sir, what a very terrible occurrence! I only heard of it an hour ago, and you will understand that as the nearest justice of the peace it devolves upon me to see that not a moment is lost in investigating the affair. How is the poor young fellow now?"

The speaker was Mr. Kenyon, the old gentleman who had been the last to leave of the guests of two nights before. His cheery face was crimson with excitement. If there was one form of participation in his neighbour's affairs in which Mr. Kenyon revelled more than another it was in the exercise of his magisterial functions, and such a case as the present did not come within his cognisance every day.

Mark Dorrisant was a striking contrast to his visitor. His eyes were sunken and haggard, looking as though the night through which he had passed had told on him physically; his voice as he answered was low, and his whole manner, naturally enough, was the manner of a man who is undergoing heavy mental strain.

"He is lying between life and death," he said. "We have had two London men down this morning in consultation with Lee and Andrews, who were with him all night, and they give us a little hope."

"Dear! dear!" ejaculated Mr. Kenyon for the third time. "Horrible thing! Horrible! And Miss Clinton? Terribly overcome she was, I hear! How is she this morning?"



"Considerably exhausted, as you will believe," returned Mark Dorrisant. "Yes, the shock overcame her entirely."

He spoke briefly, as if anxious to dismiss that branch of the subject, and Mr. Kenyon seated himself deliberately.

"Now, my dear sir," he said fussily, "you must feel with me that there is not a moment to be lost in bringing the would-be murderer to light."

"It is barely possible," Mark Dorrisant said slowly, "it is barely possible that it may have been an accident. Mind, I say this against my own conviction, because I will not deprive any one of the benefit of the doubt. My own convictions on the subject are immaterial—at present."

"Hardly," returned Mr. Kenyon. "But as to an accident, you mean it is just possible that the gun may have been lent to Mr. Cary by its owner, and have gone off accidentally?"

"It is barely possible," said Mark Dorrisant, with a grave smile, that destroyed the hypothesis even while his words admitted it.

"But most improbable, my dear sir," responded Mr. Kenyon, mistaking the influence of that smile for his own perspicacity. "Had this been the case we should have heard from Mr. Gaunt before this. Now, serious as it is to bring names into the discussion, it is of no use to beat about the bush. The facts as I have them are these. This poor young ward of yours was found last night at about ten o'clock by one of the gamekeepers in a lonely part of the park, shot in the left side. The man procured assistance and brought him here at once, and brought here also the gun found by his side. This gun is identified as belonging to Mr. Kenneth Gaunt, Miss Clinton's agent. Mr. Gaunt's gun has done the mischief—of that there is no doubt; and from Mr. Gaunt's gun one proceeds naturally to Mr. Gaunt. Now, the two young men had quarrelled, Mr. Dorrisant. I myself heard Mr. Cary appeal to you against Mr. Gaunt."

"True," returned Mark Dorrisant, with grave reserve. "Their quarrel was so violent that Miss Clinton was forced to interfere. Mr. Gaunt was requested by her to leave the house."

"Quite so, quite so!" said Mr. Kenyon eagerly. He had no ill-will towards Kenneth Gaunt—he was as kind-hearted an old gentleman as ever breathed; but his keenest sensation at the moment was one of lively enjoyment. "Now, Mr.

Gaunt is not the kind of young man to let a quarrel rest, I should say."

Mark Dorrisant rose and began to pace up and down the room.

"My stepdaughter should know his character," he said, in a low, agitated voice. "And her reception of the news——"

He broke off suddenly, as though he had said more than he intended.

"Her reception of the news?" Mr. Kenyon repeated. "Was there anything peculiar about Miss Clinton's manner? We can't go too carefully into these things."

Mark Dorrisant stopped in his walk.

"Mr. Kenyon," he said, "I am sorry the words escaped me. I have been trying to put away from me the impression that comes back upon me whenever I have time to think. My poor boy is lying upstairs half murdered, and when I think of this I can hardly control myself." He paused before he continued hoarsely: "Consequently I don't trust my own judgement. I am afraid of making evidence."

"Tut, tut!" ejaculated Mr. Kenyon, convinced that there was something most important connected with Miss Clinton and her demeanour. "Well, suppose you tell me the facts, and leave it to me to discriminate. Miss Clinton was shocked, of course?"

"She was shocked, but she was not surprised."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the electrified justice of the peace. "Do you mean she knew of it beforehand?"

"I mean that she had reason to believe that Mr. Gaunt's grudge against my poor boy was a deadly one. The impression I cannot get rid of is that Mr. Gaunt had threatened my boy in her hearing."

"But this is most important, sir," exclaimed Mr. Kenyon in intense excitement. "Threatened! Can I see Miss Clinton?"

"I hardly know," returned Mark Dorrisant slowly; he seemed to be deliberating with himself. "My stepdaughter is very much shaken."

"Naturally," assented Mr. Kenyon, "if she has such important evidence on her mind! She will be relieved, I'm sure, to be questioned."

"I doubt——" began Mark Dorrisant dubiously.

But his hesitation only rendered Mr. Kenyon more bent upon the interview he proposed.

"My dear sir," he said with much dignity, "in a merely private capacity I should not, of course, think of trespassing

on Miss Clinton's seclusion; but, in the cause of justice, I must beg you to ask her to spare me a few moments."

Mark Dorrisant paused for another moment, and then he left the room.

Ten minutes passed, and Mr. Kenyon began to grow restless; ten minutes more, and his curiosity waxed to a preternatural extent. Ten minutes yet, and he had almost forgotten that he was not actually seated on the bench, when Mark Dorrisant came in again alone.

"My stepdaughter will be with us in a moment," he said hurriedly. "Mr. Kenyon, I should be extremely obliged if you will ask her no questions. The subject seems to give her great pain. Mr. Gaunt—the idea of implicating Mr. Gaunt seems peculiarly distasteful to her. I had no idea——"

He broke off suddenly, and stood aside as Valentine entered the room, and Mr. Kenyon rose with his most magisterial air to receive her.

Valentine was very pale; her eyes, like her stepfather's, were sunken, and there were heavy shadows beneath them. But there was nothing about her in the least suggestive of that agitation which Mark Dorrisant had tacitly imputed to her. On the contrary, the most noticeable feature about her was a composure that seemed excessive under the circumstances. Nor was there that reluctance in her manner which would have been consistent with the length of time it had apparently taken to persuade her to appear. She came in, on the contrary, quietly, shook hands with Mr. Kenyon in silence, and replied to his enquiries as to her health very simply. Only her eyes were unnaturally bright—bright as physical pain might have made them.

"Now, my dear Miss Clinton," he said, with pompous pleasantness; "now, I've one or two questions to ask you, and I'm sure you won't allow any—any very natural dislike to—to what may seem like pointing suspicion at any one to prevent your answering to the best of your ability. Justice must be done, you know, my dear young lady, however painful it may be."

He glanced at Mark Dorrisant, and Valentine answered:

"Of course, Mr. Kenyon. Justice is everything."

She was whiter than she had been, and there was an unusual ring in her voice.

"Quite so," was the approving answer.

"Well, now, Miss Clinton, do you happen

to have seen Mr. Gaunt, your agent, since he dined here two nights since, may I ask?"

Valentine started. She had evidently not been prepared for such a question.

"Yes," she said, and her voice was low and rather uncertain.

"Ah! yes," said her interlocutor, becoming increasingly oblivious of the unofficial nature of the proceeding. "Now, what passed between you? Was any reference made to his quarrel with young Mr. Cary on the previous evening?"

Valentine lifted her head suddenly. Her lips were not steady, in spite of her evident efforts to control them. She did not speak, but glanced across to her stepfather as if with an involuntary appeal for support. With the same restrained intentness with which he had hitherto listened, Mark Dorrisant responded mutely to the mute appeal. He came and stood behind her chair. There was another moment's pause, and then Valentine said quickly:

"I dismissed Mr. Gaunt. I am not satisfied with his work."

Mark Dorrisant, standing behind her, looked across at Mr. Kenyon with a pitying expression that begged him to accept the statement. Meeting the look, Mr. Kenyon became aware that it required investigating.

"I am sorry to have to press the question; I am afraid it is painful to you, my dear young lady," he said. "But I must ask whether the quarrel between these two young men had anything to do with your dismissal of Mr. Gaunt?"

There was another pause, and Valentine's eyes grew brighter yet, and a burning spot of colour appeared on the dead white of her cheeks.

"Not directly," she said at last.

"But indirectly?" said Mr. Kenyon promptly. "Ah! And Mr. Gaunt knew this?"

"Yes."

"And he was naturally—well, let us say annoyed?"

"Yes."

"He was very much annoyed? Now, did he, in the excitement of the moment, use anything like a threat in connection with Mr. Cary?"

With an inarticulate cry Valentine sprang to her feet, stretching out one hand to her stepfather as she looked down on her interlocutor with flashing eyes.

"Pater," she cried, "I won't be cross-questioned like this; it's unendurable!"

With a glance at the astonished Mr. Kenyon, Mr. Dorrisant drew her hands into his own and held them firmly.

"My dear Valentine," he said, "calm yourself. You are giving an impression which is far worse than the truth, I am sure. Tell Mr. Kenyon Mr. Gaunt's exact words."

His manner, tender and commanding—a manner that he had never used to her before—had an instantaneous effect on her. The fire died out of her eyes, the hot colour from her face.

"He said," she began, in a low, choked voice, addressing herself to Dorrisant rather than to Mr. Kenyon, "he said——"

At that moment there was a sound of quick footsteps in the hall outside, the door was flung open, and into the room, unannounced, breathless, and very white, burst Kenneth Gaunt. He stopped short for an instant as the trio already assembled turned simultaneously towards him. Then he came rapidly on, saying impetuously:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Clinton; they didn't tell me you were here. But it's just as well. I've come up about—about what they say in the village. I've only just heard it. Perhaps you don't know that they say it's my doing—this accident, I mean."

He had poured out the words incoherently, evidently carried completely out of himself by his indignant horror, looking from one to the other of the three faces turned towards him, but with something in his voice that addressed itself solely to Valentine.

It was Mark Dorrisant who answered him very coldly.

"Yes," he said, "we know."

"But you know, of course, that it's all nonsense!" cried Kenneth eagerly. "I've behaved like a bear, Mr. Dorrisant; still, you don't think so badly of me as to believe this of me, I know?"

There was no answer. With his face set like an iron mask, Mark Dorrisant looked deliberately away from the young man. There was a deep breath from Kenneth, and something seemed to pass across his excited face, whitening it and stilling it perceptibly; then Mr. Kenyon, recovering some of his sense of official importance from the confusion into which the last two or three minutes had thrown him, said:

"It is hardly a question for belief or disbelief, Mr. Gaunt. Unfortunately sundry

very suspicious circumstances connect you with the crime—if crime there has been. Your gun——"

"I know!" interrupted Kenneth eagerly. "I had been out all the afternoon with my gun, and coming home through the park I found my dog caught in a trap. The poor beast was badly hurt, and I propped the gun against a tree while I attended to him, and completely forgot it when I carried him home. I only remembered it about two hours after."

Into one of the three faces which he confronted there leapt, as he made his impetuous explanation, the intense relief of anticipation satisfied, and Valentine turned swiftly to Mr. Kenyon. But he stopped her with a movement of his hand.

"And at what time did you reach home, Mr. Gaunt?" he said. His face and voice were alike portentously solemn, and a shock—a curiously similar shock—passed over the faces of Valentine and Kenneth.

"I've no idea," answered Kenneth quickly. "It must have been about half-past nine. My servant had gone to bed, and I was too busy with the dog to think of the time."

There was a slight movement from Mark Dorrisant, but he did not speak. There was a moment's pause, and then Mr. Kenyon said loftily:

"Very unfortunate, Mr. Gaunt."

The light died out of Valentine's face, and Kenneth Gaunt's face grew rather pale and stern.

"Am I to understand," he said, addressing himself directly to Mr. Kenyon with a proud, peremptory ring in his voice, "that I am being seriously accused of this thing?"

"You are to understand, Mr. Gaunt," said Mr. Kenyon pompously, "that your unsupported word—happy as I should be in a private capacity to accept it—does not refute the circumstantial evidence afforded by the acknowledged agency of your gun in this matter. You are known to have quarrelled with Mr. Cary; evidence will be forthcoming to show that you have uttered threats against him——"

"Threats!" interposed Kenneth hotly. "Threats!"

He stopped abruptly and looked, almost for the first time, directly at Valentine. She did not look at him, as she said in a low, almost unnaturally steady voice:

"If by 'evidence' Mr. Kenyon means anything I may have said, it is only just that every one should understand that I

myself entirely disbelieve that Mr. Gaunt has had any hand whatever in the matter."

"Thank you," said Kenneth in a low tone.

There was a moment's pause, and the atmosphere seemed to be overcharged with some kind of tense emotion. Then Mark Dorrisant broke the spell. Laying his hand gently on his stepdaughter's shoulder, he turned to Mr. Kenyon, and said in a low voice, as though urging him to end a painful scene:

"What do you propose to do?"

"I propose to issue a warrant against Mr. Gaunt on suspicion," was the prompt reply. "He will see, I am sure, that no other course is open to me." Then, as Kenneth, white to the lips, his face very set and proud, bent his head in acquiescence, the old gentleman turned to Valentine. "My dear young lady," he said kindly, "we won't detain you any longer. Give me permission to give your man an order, and then let Mr. Dorrisant take you upstairs."

Valentine did not wait for her stepfather's escort. Before either Mark Dorrisant or Mr. Kenyon had realised her movement, she had crossed the room to the door. It was opened for her by Kenneth, and she passed out, white as death, without another word.

Half an hour later Kenneth Gaunt was in the hands of the local police, arrested on suspicion.

#### CHAPTER X. THE CHARGE DISMISSED.

SIX weeks went by, and Geoffrey Cary lay between life and death, and the charge against Kenneth Gaunt remained in abeyance. The case was brought before the magistrates on the day following his arrest, and was by them remanded "pending the production of further evidence." It was obvious that while young Cary lived nothing could be done until he might recover consciousness. Bail was offered for Kenneth and was finally accepted; and he was free to go about his business as he best might, a man under a heavy cloud, shunned and suspected on every hand.

For the public mind of Templecombe fastened on him as the criminal from the very first, and allowed no possibility of doubt.

There was, indeed, a minority who had several cogent objections to offer. In the first place, these dissenters asserted that the evidence forthcoming against Kenneth Gaunt was purely circumstantial, and as

such to be treated with diffidence. Secondly, that Kenneth Gaunt had proved himself during his life at Templecombe to be a man of truth and honour, and that his word, therefore, deserved credence. This opinion gained strength from the fact that his word was fully borne out in one particular, inasmuch as his dog was limping about the village, lamed by the teeth of a trap. They further maintained that no man in his senses, having attempted murder, would leave his gun on the spot as evidence against himself. To this minority one comprehensive question was propounded: if Mr. Gaunt were not the criminal, who was?—a question the answer to which was apparently very far to seek. And as the days went on and public interest in the matter was continually freshened by the weekly remanding of the case before the magistrate, and the atmosphere of suspense thus created, every discussion of the subject ended more and more surely with a reference to that hoped-for recovery of consciousness by Geoffrey Cary which was becoming the very goal of public anticipation.

The weary days dragged themselves slowly away as Mark Dorrisant and Valentine stood helplessly by, while Geoffrey's fever ran its course, and neither Kenneth Gaunt nor the day when those alternations of delirium and stupor should pass into consciousness was ever mentioned between them.

That the stern patience and reserve with which Mark Dorrisant waited were the result of rigid self-control, no one who spoke to him in those days could doubt. That he believed in Kenneth Gaunt's guilt was equally certain, though no word to that effect ever crossed his lips. His very silence and self-repression on the subject gave to his conviction a weight which no words could have produced. And on Valentine each day as it passed seemed to leave an absolutely perceptible trace; they seemed to be literally wearing her away, she grew so white and so slight. In manner she was always composed and quiet, but there was that about her that suggested the presence of a continual strain—not merely the strain of the hourly anxiety about Geoffrey—but of something beyond, of which she did not speak. To her stepfather's tenderness she responded with an affection which seemed to grow with every hour of their common anxiety. They lived, as it were, a mutual life, in which the forthcoming report from the sick-room was the goal of their thoughts. If each lived another and



a separate life in which the goal lay further off, neither ever spoke of it.

And at last that far-off goal was reached. Geoffrey Cary struggled back from the gates of death, and recovered consciousness.

Perhaps a blanker feeling of disappointment was never experienced than that which obtained at Templecombe when it was whispered about that young Mr. Cary was entirely unable to throw any light on the affair of which he was the hero. His evidence began and ended in the statement that he had been walking quickly through the park at about nine o'clock in the evening, when he had heard a shot, had felt a stinging, numbing sensation in his side, and had lost consciousness. He had seen absolutely nothing.

It was three days since Geoffrey had made this disappointing declaration, a hot morning in the first week of August. It was about eleven o'clock and Mark Dorrisant was alone with his ward; he was standing by his bed, and the two had evidently been talking.

The face at which he was looking down was like the ghost of the Geoffrey of seven weeks before. There was not a trace of colour in it, all the boyish outlines were sharpened and emaciated, and the curly, luxuriant hair was cropped close. Only his eyes were the same, honest and smiling. They were rather too bright now—the conversation seemed to have excited him a little—as he looked up at Mark Dorrisant, and said, in a weak voice:

"All right, then, Pater; what you do is sure to be right. And somehow I shouldn't have thought that that fellow was the sort to do a thing like this." He paused a moment and then added reflectively: "It was rather a blackguardly thing, wasn't it? I wonder awfully who it really was!"

Mark Dorrisant did not answer instantly. He put out one of his hands and laid it on the boy's head.

"I wonder!" he said.

There was a shadowy little smile about his lips as he spoke, and Geoffrey, looking up at him, exclaimed:

"You're awfully sure it was Gaunt, Pater."

This time Mark Dorrisant did not answer him at all. His face set itself sternly.

"You're tired, my boy," he said; "rest now and think no more about it." He paused, and touched the boy's forehead again affectionately as he added: "I must go."

On this August morning, after nearly

two months of postponement and delay, the charge against Kenneth Gaunt was to come before the magistrates for what was tacitly understood to be a final hearing, and the excitement throughout the neighbourhood was at fever pitch. As Mark Dorrisant came downstairs now from Geoffrey's room, the carriage was already waiting for him and for Valentine, summoned once more to give evidence as to the threatening words used to her by Kenneth Gaunt against Geoffrey Cary.

"Go to your mistress," said Dorrisant to a servant, "and ask her, if she is ready, if she will come down to me in the drawing-room."

A few moments later Valentine came down the stairs with her hat on, and went into the drawing-room. She was very pale and quiet, and there was an added touch of haughtiness about her, as though she were nerved to meet some sort of ordeal. She smiled at Dorrisant, and as he held out his hand she put hers into it, and waited for him to speak.

"Valentine," he said gravely, "I want to tell you something before we start. I think you will be glad to hear it. I saw Mr. Kenyon yesterday, as you know, and we came to a decision which I have just been talking over with Geoffrey. The charge against Mr. Gaunt will be dismissed to-day on the plea of insufficient evidence."

Valentine started slightly, and drew her hand away, as if involuntarily.

"Dismissed!" she said quickly, in a low voice. "Dismissed! Then will he be cleared?"

She was looking down at the handle of the sunshade she held, and therefore she did not see Mark Dorrisant's look at her. But she noticed that there was a pause, and before he spoke he laid one hand on hers, as a sort of prelude.

"All I need say," he began gently, "is, that though the evidence against Mr. Gaunt is heavy, it would be almost impossible to prove the case in a court of law, and under the circumstances—as, thank Heaven, it is not a case of murder—I have told Mr. Kenyon that we should greatly prefer not to prosecute."

"Then the only way to clear him would be to find the real criminal?"

"To find the real criminal, yes!" assented Mark Dorrisant drily.

Valentine's colour rose.

"Pater!" she said impulsively, "you mean most kindly, I know, but justice is

better than kindness. Don't let this charge be withdrawn. They say that my evidence weighs heavily against Mr. Gaunt, and I know that that evidence means absolutely nothing! If the case is properly tried the truth must come out, and Mr. Gaunt will be cleared. Don't let injustice be done!"

She was facing him bravely, with unshrieking eyes looking straight into his face. It was for justice, she was saying to herself. Mark Dorrisant looked at her keenly for a moment, and then a shade of pain settled down upon his face.

"Queen Val," he said gently, "I am sorry that there should be one subject on which we think differently. It is time to start."

By the evening it was known all over Templecombe that the charge against Kenneth Gaunt had been dismissed by the magistrate. The stain against his name was in no wise eradicated; the mystery was in no wise cleared up. As far as Templecombe and the countryside went, Kenneth Gaunt was a disgraced man.

#### CHAPTER XI. THE INJUSTICE.

"YOU'RE coming to live in London, too, Val? Oh, how jolly! Don't make it miles away from Pater and me, will you?"

"You are a silly boy, Geoff!"

"I don't see that! Tell me why, or I'll throw off all these rugs you've put on me."

"And prove it conclusively." Valentine laughed. She was sitting on the end of a sofa in her morning-room, on which sofa Geoffrey Cary was lying. The room was very bright and sunny; about all the inanimate things there was a sort of a reflex festival air, which curiously enough seemed to emanate, in the first place, from the thin, white-faced figure on the sofa. This was the first day on which Geoffrey Cary had been able to leave his room.

Mrs. Carryl was established in a large wicker chair near the window, on Geoffrey's right-hand side. She seemed always to gravitate towards large chairs, as if impelled by a sense of the shelter they might possibly afford to her, mentally and physically, by screening her from the world. In her hands was a new strip of the lace she was always working; she looked like a little automaton which had never altered its action since the long-ago day when Valentine had first spoken to her of Mr. Dorrisant. New people, a new atmosphere, startling and terrible incidents, all seemed to come and go around that placid, weak little soul, without approaching it.

On Valentine's lap lay a book, from which she had been reading aloud until the clock struck twelve, when she had laid it down, and declared that Geoffrey was to be left alone, and to proceed instantly to take an hour's sleep before luncheon. But before she could rise to put the first part of this mandate into effect, Geoffrey had assailed her with half-a-dozen questions, to which he required instant answers.

Of these she had supplied several; and she rose now quickly, and stood over him in a menacing attitude, though a smile trembled round her lips.

"You're very silly," she said, "from every point of view." She bent down and tucked the rugs round him with a gentle force. "What I meant was this: of course I don't mean to be separated from you or Pater, you goose! And now I'm going; and if you don't do as I wish and go to sleep this moment, you can't be taken to Ventnor on Thursday."

Geoffrey turned an imploring face to the wicker chair, with the evident intention of appealing to its occupant. But Valentine was too quick for him.

"No," she said promptly, "Marion is neither going to sympathise with you nor to stay with you. Come, Marion," she added, and as Mrs. Carryl, slowly awakened to the fact that Valentine was going, emerged from her chair, Valentine, with a smiling nod to Geoffrey, remorselessly left him to himself.

Only a week had passed since the day when the charge against Kenneth Gaunt had been finally dismissed. But very marked effects had been produced in that time. Geoffrey himself had made large strides towards recovery, and the rapidity with which his convalescence drew on engendered a corresponding rapidity in the maturing of plans for the future.

In ten days more the whole party—Valentine, Mrs. Carryl, Mark Dorrisant, and Geoffrey—were to go to Ventnor, for the change of air ordered for the latter; and Templecombe was to be shut up for an indefinite period. Valentine had announced a determination which took no one by surprise. She intended, she said, to take a house in London, and spend the winter there.

Before she finally settled this, another arrangement was entered into, not without some demur on Mark Dorrisant's part. It was, in her eyes, the most important part of Valentine's plan, that he and Geoffrey Cary should live with her during the

process of establishing the latter in London. Mark Dorrisant had fully intended, he said, to take for himself and the boy a set of chambers; and he would not hear of any other course unless Valentine agreed that the establishment she wished to set up should be a joint household in deed as well as in name. But when Valentine had been brought to consent to this stipulation, he yielded with a grace only enhanced by his previous hesitation.

The change in Geoffrey, the stir and exhilaration consequent on the anticipation of other changes to come, cleared away all heaviness of oppression in the atmosphere of the house, and brought about a reaction of cheerfulness. In the village, too, the excitement was passing away. The only definite result of the whole affair was the fact that Kenneth Gaunt had his life to begin anew with a millstone round his neck, and this fact was entirely undisturbing to the public mind.

Only to Valentine the reaction seemed to come rather forcedly, and to ring a little falsely when it came. She was outwardly sweet and bright as ever; tender and affectionate with both Geoffrey and her stepfather. But her eyes were too bright; her cheeks were too pink; her voice always too excited.

She turned to Mrs. Carryl now as she shut the door of Geoffrey's room, and the laugh died from her face.

"Come into my room, Marion," she said in a low, imperious tone, so strikingly dissimilar to the gaiety with which she had spoken in the same breath as to be almost startling. "I want to speak to you." She led the way, and as Mrs. Carryl followed her into her room, she signed to her to shut the door. "Marion," she began, confronting the little woman, with something suggestive of defiance in her spirited pose, "I want you to drive to the Grange with Mr. Dorrisant this afternoon. Mr. Gaunt is coming to see me on business, and I—of course there must be no chance of their meeting."

"Mr. Gaunt," ejaculated Mrs. Carryl blankly. "Oh, Valentine——"

Valentine struck her foot impatiently on the ground.

"Marion," she said, "I have told you already that I consider Mr. Gaunt has been unjustly treated. I do not for one moment believe that he did what he was accused of doing, you know that very well."

Mrs. Carryl assented with deprecating haste, and added feebly:

"Everybody believes he did it. Mr. Dorrisant——"

"I know," interrupted Valentine quickly, and a heavy shadow passed across her face. "We need not talk about it, Marion. I would not hurt my stepfather for the world. Don't I know what Geoffrey is to him, and how he must feel——" She broke off, and her face quivered; but apparently she was afraid of herself and her emotions, for she took refuge in an access of imperiousness, which was somewhat at variance with the nervous movements of her fingers. "So you see, Marion," she said, "though I think it only just to see Mr. Gaunt, and wind up the business of the estate with him in person, I do not wish the fact to be forced upon Mr. Dorrisant."

"No, of course not," said Mrs. Carryl meekly. "It's rather awkward for you, isn't it, Valentine?"

Valentine did not answer. She turned away, and walking slowly to the window, stood there looking out in silence. Mrs. Carryl waited timidly. Then finding that Valentine did not speak, she as timidly withdrew. At last Valentine turned sharply.

"One must be just," she said under her breath in a strange, defiant tone. "It is the injustice that is so horrible—that I cannot bear."

Her eyes were shining and gleaming, and her lips trembled a little.

They were trembling again, and her eyes looked out dark and dilated from a pale face, when, on a summons from the footman that afternoon, she went downstairs to the library. She laid her hand on the lock and paused for a moment as if involuntarily. Her breath was coming quickly. Then, setting her lips, she opened the door.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Gaunt," she said, holding out her hand with grave dignity. But as the figure waiting for her advanced to meet her, and the light fell full upon his face, her lips closed again with a contraction of the muscles which Kenneth saw and misinterpreted. He did not know how nearly a horrified exclamation had broken from those proudly curved lips.

Kenneth Gaunt looked ten years older than he had looked when they had last stood face to face in that room. It was not only that he was thin and worn; it was not only that there were lines about his mouth and eyes. All the fire, all the

eager youth and enthusiasm seemed to have been, for the time at least, overwhelmed and stamped out. His eyes had lost their spirit; there was a strange expression in them in which bewilderment and wistfulness were oddly blended, and which hardly harmonised with the resolute endurance into which the rest of his features were composed. To Kenneth the events of the past few weeks had meant much more, even, than they must inevitably have meant for any man. They had meant a rough awakening—a realisation of sundry facts about himself and his relations with his neighbours.

With a hot temper and a high spirit on which no softening influence of home had ever been brought to bear, Kenneth Gaunt had gone through life so far in a rough-and-ready, high-handed fashion. The world had been a combination of playground and battle-field for him ever since he had first been tumbled into it—a jolly little motherless fellow of seven, turned adrift in a public school. Like many another fiery, impetuous person, his faults were all on the surface; all the harm that was in him came out. But he never realised that few people stop to consider what lies below the surface, and that no amount of integrity or warm-heartedness can wholly counteract the effect of a hot temper and a tongue regardless of consequences. He had been vaguely conscious of his impetuosity and self-assertiveness; but he had looked upon them as faults easily condoned, and at the bottom of his heart there lurked an unconscious estimate of himself as a "good sort of fellow." To find himself seriously accused of a dastardly crime; to find that nine-tenths of the people among whom he had lived for four years found nothing preposterous and incredible in such a charge in connection with him, had been a shock to him under which the foundations of his world seemed to give way. And the effect upon him of the blow was a testimony to the real good that lay beneath the surface. Instead of raging at circumstances and people, he "looked at home," as the saying goes, sobered and tamed. During those long weeks of suspense as he went about in bitter loneliness, he had come slowly and painfully to a clearer and a humbler perception on many points. If, at the end, the true criminal had been discovered and his innocence established beyond a doubt, the impress made by those weeks would still have remained. As it was, social shipwreck

seemed only the natural result of the temporary shipwreck of all his old ideas.

He shook hands with Valentine now very quietly; waited while she moved on to the big chair at the writing-table, and then sat down opposite her. They had sat so, often and often, discussing business details; they had thwarted and opposed one another, so, over and over again.

There was a moment's silence, and then Kenneth unfolded the papers he had brought with him in a grave, businesslike manner. For nearly half an hour there was no sound in the library but the sound of their rustle, the rise and fall of his voice, and her brief responses. For nearly half an hour they sat one on either side of the table, and her eyes rested on her clasped hands, or met his for an instant as he looked up at her to be sure that he was making himself clear. Valentine grew whiter and whiter, and when the last paper was put aside and he lifted his head for the last time, she leant back in her chair, and a short breath parted her lips.

Kenneth glanced at her quickly. His face was flushed, and his hand was clenched as though it might have trembled had he allowed the muscles to relax.

"There is only one thing more," he said, "the contracts, estimates, and so forth, for the cottages. Here they are." He put his hand into his pocket as he spoke, and drew out an envelope, which he handed to her. "You will see I have written in all the necessary explanations. I"—he paused, and added in a lower voice: "I did not expect to have a personal interview with you until I got your note."

"There was no reason against it," said Valentine, her eyes fixed steadily on the blotting-pad before her. "I do not believe—what has been said."

"I can't thank you."

The words were low and broken, and they were succeeded by a moment's pause.

Valentine's hands were clasped tightly together. At last she said:

"You are going away to-morrow?"

"Yes," he answered heavily.

"Will you tell me what you are going to do?"

He lifted his head wearily and looked away.

"I don't know," he said. "It doesn't matter much."

"Oh, don't say that." The words came from Valentine against her will, apparently, and as he turned to her as if surprised,



with a light in his eyes, she went on quickly: "Injust'ce is such a horrible thing; it is a thing I cannot bear. And it is so dreadful to think of a man's life being spoilt because of it. Some day the truth will come out. It must. I'm sure it must."

He smiled faintly, and the light died out of his eyes.

"It is not the injustice," he said simply. "Not altogether, at least." There was another silence, broken this time by Kenneth. He rose. "I need not keep you any longer," he said. "Only—there is one thing. I want to apologise for all the times I've behaved like a cad. If," he hesitated, and then continued hurriedly, "if I could apologise to Mr. Dorrisant and Mr. Cary I would do so. As that is not possible, I apologise to you for my conduct to them. Why you should believe in me after all that has come and gone, I don't know. It only shows—what you are."

She had risen quickly as he spoke, and now she put out her hand impulsively as if to stop him. He accepted the gesture as his dismissal.

"Good-bye," he said simply. "I am very grateful to you for seeing me."

"Good-bye," she answered coldly.

He dropped her hand and turned away to the door; opened it, his face set and white, and closed it behind him. And then, as Valentine had done only a little earlier, he paused on the threshold. He let his forehead fall on his clenched hands, and a great sob shook him from head to foot.

"It's all over," he muttered to himself. "It's all over, and I shall never see her again."

And on the other side of the heavy door Valentine, her arms resting on the table and her face buried in them, was saying to herself over and over again:

"It is the injustice! It is the injustice!"

#### CHAPTER XII. "MY OLD FRIEND."

It was a frosty December morning, and Rotten Row presented a very cheery spectacle. The sun was shining; the air was crisp and fresh; and a sense of exhilaration seemed to be all-pervading among riders and horses alike.

And not one of the riders was enjoying himself or herself more thoroughly and openly than Geoffrey Cary as he galloped along at Valentine's side, laughing and talking in headlong, inconsequent boyish

fashion, catching up her merry answers and retorting on them again, until at last she reined in her horse to a walk, and turned with a laughing appeal to Dorrisant.

"Will you kindly forbid Geoff, Pater?" she said. "I will not have him flirting with Miss Lorraine in my house or at my party. Geoff you shall just go to bed before the party begins to-night!"

There was a flush on Valentine's cheeks, brought there by the air and the exercise; her eyes were sparkling. She never showed to better advantage than on horseback, and it was not wonderful that more than one passer-by turned to look at the trio.

Nearly four months had passed since Templecombe had been left empty, and for two of those four months Valentine had been established in a house in Bruton Street; and with her, as had been arranged, were established Mark Dorrisant and Geoffrey Cary.

During these two months "the step-family," as Geoffrey called it, had settled itself down in the pleasant London house, to a pleasant London life. Mark Dorrisant had told Valentine that it was part of his plan for Geoffrey that the boy should see something of London society. It was a bad time of year for the purpose, but the many people who had known Valentine's aunt were ready to welcome Valentine; and Valentine's relations or friends were instantly welcomed for her sakes. But it was not long before both Mark Dorrisant and Geoffrey Cary were welcome for their own sakes; and the presence of the attractive trio made by the "step-family" became a feature of every gathering, "smart" or informal, that enlivened the foggy November days.

The atmosphere of the house in Bruton Street was one of constant gaiety and high spirits. Geoffrey enjoyed life with unflagging zest and energy; Mark Dorrisant, apparently well satisfied, was always ready to promote pleasant schemes. As to Valentine herself, she was the queen of the house, and she reigned with a characteristic variableness. She turned to her stepfather more and more, with that generous confidence which is only possible to such a character. She played with and tyrannised over Geoffrey, her own youth exhilarated by the companionship of the youth at which she laughed in him. The shadow of the nearly accomplished tragedy that had darkened their life at Templecombe faded away in this new atmosphere as completely as if it had never existed.

Perhaps an added excitement was given to these months by a sense that the life they brought was only preliminary. Geoffrey's majority was to come about in February, and there was a tacit understanding that it would bring with it some as yet indefinite change. Everything, all plans and arrangements, led up to the twelfth of February, and there stopped short. Geoffrey's majority might prove the threshold of a state of things pleasanter even than the present, by reason of greater permanence; but it was a threshold, and at present the door was closed. Geoffrey himself talked little about his future life; only a word let fall now and then in confidential moments with Valentine showed that a sense of responsibility was alive and growing beneath his boyish light-heartedness.

And yet, in spite of her gaiety and brightness, even now as she walked her horse between Mark Dorrisant and Geoffrey, there was something about Valentine's face that made it strangely different from the face of the girl who had reigned alone at Templecombe nine months before. It was difficult to say what the change was, or where it lay. It would have been hard to say that she looked older, and yet that was the definition to which the difference most readily accommodated itself. Searching from feature to feature, the change might have been discovered in the eyes. For all their light and sparkle there was something in their depths which never altered; something which makes the difference between a woman's eyes and a child's. Mrs. Carryl had a vague conviction that Valentine had grown strangely uncertain, not only in her ways, but in her temper; and that she was surely more wilful and imperious than she had been before.

"Why did you ask Miss Lorraine?" said Mark Dorrisant, with a smile. "Geoff's heart is not a mill-stone, Queen Val."

She echoed his laugh merrily, and then said:

"We'll have one more canter, and then I must go in. I want to see that the flowers are all right."

"You want to go and gloat over that swell frock of yours," retorted Geoffrey, with a laugh, as he touched his horse lightly with his whip.

The party in question was a large dance which Valentine was giving that same night, the prospect of which had greatly excited Geoffrey. And his excitement was shared, though in different fashion, by Valentine. She had given no entertainment hitherto

on so large a scale, and the exhilaration of her manner this morning was due to some extent to her anticipation of the evening.

The Miss Lorraine mentioned by Valentine was the latest idol of Geoffrey's susceptible heart; a woman, or, as she herself said, "a girl" of about thirty, who was very pretty, very gushing, very popular, and very conscious of the fact that she had been Miss Lorraine for more seasons than she liked. Valentine was just going to retaliate, by reopening fire on the subject, when she was interrupted by an exclamation from Geoffrey.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed; "there's that fellow again. Look, Pater!" he continued eagerly, turning in his saddle; "no, you can't see him now, though; he is walking this way, but he's behind the trees. A great tall fellow, with a great red moustache, staring at Val like one o'clock. I should like to knock him down."

"A poor device, Geoff!" exclaimed Valentine as Mark Dorrisant turned in the direction indicated, and shook his head. "It's very natural that you should want to turn the conversation, but you shouldn't do it so obviously!"

"I don't!" maintained Geoffrey stontly. "The man was staring, Val, and I saw him staring before! As to Miss Lorraine, I shall dance every dance with her to-night except those we sit out—come now!"

He laughed, a boy's jolly laugh; and Valentine laughed back as she responded:

"You can't, sir! You will be a gentleman of the house, and you'll have to dance with everybody. It will be your duty."

"I say!" ejaculated Geoffrey saucily. "And we counted up fifty girls at least coming!"

They were in the road by this time, and a quarter of an hour brought them to their own door.

"I'm not coming in now, Queen Val," said Mark Dorrisant, as he dismounted her. "But I shall be in to lunch. I'm going to see about that bouquet among other things," he added with a smile.

She smiled back at him with a word or two of pretty thanks, and then went up the steps followed by Geoffrey. Dorrisant watched them into the house, and then, as the door closed upon them, he turned away and began to retrace his steps down the street. A curious change came over him as he did so, a change under which even his singularly fine eyes seemed to become less beautiful. His whole face seemed absolutely to harden physically, as

though every muscle was slightly contracted in the close thought in which he had become intent. He was so absorbed that he did not notice a man who was standing at the corner of the street watching his approach, and evidently waiting for him; a strongly-built man with a red moustache, who had got out of a hansom there as the riders dismounted. Mark Dorrisant came up to the corner and stood for a moment waiting to cross, still with that hard, pre-occupied face. He was just moving on, hardly conscious of the presence of the man who was absolutely by his side, when the latter laid a hand suddenly on his shoulder. "Well met, Mark, old boy," he said.

With a start as violent as though a pistol had been fired at his very ear, Mark Dorrisant turned and confronted the speaker, and then grew suddenly still from head to foot, staring into the florid face before him, his own face colourless and rigid.

Lunch-time came and Valentine, Geoffrey, and Mrs. Carryl alone made their appearance in the dining-room; the two former to comment to one another with some surprise on Mark Dorrisant's non-appearance.

"He will be in directly, no doubt," said Valentine, as she sat down. But the minutes passed by, lunch was finished, and still the place at the foot of the table was unoccupied. It was nearly four o'clock, and Valentine was sitting alone in her morning-room writing notes when Dorrisant came in quickly.

"My dear Valentine," he exclaimed, "I have come to beg your pardon. You didn't wait lunch, of course?"

Valentine had turned to him with a smile, and as she answered him brightly he threw himself into a chair near her table. His manner was even more disengaged, his tone more careless and pleasant than usual.

"My excuse is a good one, at any rate," he said; "I met an old friend."

"Yes?" said Valentine interestedly.

"What a little world it is after all, Queen Val! I lost sight of this fellow about five years ago; I've tried to get news of him again and again, and then we met suddenly in the street."

His tone was full of pleasure and excitement—almost emotion; and Valentine responded with quick sympathy:

"He was a great friend of yours, then? How delightful! I am so glad, Pater!"

He let his eyes rest on her face for a moment.

"That's like you, Queen Val," he said gently. "Yes," he went on, half dreamily; "yes, he was a great friend of mine, dear old Scudamore. It was an immense pleasure to see him again."

"I'm so glad!" exclaimed Valentine again. "When is he coming to see you here? We must ask him to dinner. I shall so like to know one of your old friends."

Mark Dorrisant smiled.

"Perhaps you wouldn't care about him, Queen Val," he said. "He is the best fellow that ever lived, but I don't know that he can be called exactly polished. He's very anxious to be introduced to you, but—no; on the whole I think not."

He spoke as though the question were not of much importance, and Valentine, her interest quickened by opposition, exclaimed with laughing imperiousness:

"Oh, but I think yes, Pater! Don't you think I can appreciate anything but polish? Of course I shall like him."

"He saw you in the Park this morning," went on Dorrisant, "and as I said before, he is very anxious to be introduced." He looked at Valentine with a smile, and a little flush came into her cheeks as she drew up her head with a gesture that was indescribably charming. "I'm afraid he conducted himself in his usual rough-and-ready fashion," Dorrisant added with a light laugh. "I gather that he is the man whom Geoff wished to knock down for staring at you."

His tone and manner transformed the episode from the insult which Geoffrey had made of it into a rather touching tribute of irrepressible admiration, and Valentine's laugh was by no means ill-pleased.

"Geoff won't knock him down here, I dare say," she said. "Pater, I simply insist on his being introduced to me."

"Perhaps you would like to send him an invitation for to-night?" suggested Dorrisant, laughing.

"Of course I should!" exclaimed Valentine. "What a capital thought! No, Pater"—as Dorrisant began to protest—"no, it's no use. I shall write the card this moment, and you must send it."

It was the queen of the house at her most imperious, and Dorrisant shrugged his shoulders in useless expostulation as she turned to her writing-table. When he left Valentine a moment or two later the card of invitation addressed to Robert Scudamore, Esq., was in his hand, and his first action was to despatch it to its destination by a special messenger.

At eleven o'clock that night the pretty house looked its very prettiest; and moving through the rooms, amid all the colour, light, and music, was a crowd of well-dressed men and women, talking, dancing, coming and going, all at once, it seemed.

Just inside the drawing-room door stood Valentine, receiving her guests, gracious and graceful, dressed in a wonderful white silk frock and carrying a beautiful bouquet her stepfather had given her two hours before. Mark Dorrisant stood beside her, and more than once she said to him with laughing defiance in her pretty eyes: "Where is Mr. Scudamore?"

The rooms were nearly full when she heard her name pronounced, and turning quickly, found Dorrisant standing before her with a big, red-moustached man by his side.

"Valentine," said Mark Dorrisant, "may I introduce my old friend Scudamore?"

#### CHAPTER XIII. MR. DORRISANT FINDS MRS. CARRYL ALONE.

"Good night, Mr. Scudamore. You must let us see as much as possible of you, as you are in London for such an uncertain time. Will you come and dine with us quietly on Friday?"

It was Valentine who spoke, and she stood beside a dismantled supper-table among the last lingerers who had stayed for a merry little supper with the house party. Of these lingerers, Mr. Scudamore had made one on Valentine's own invitation. After her first reception of her stepfather's friend, she had had very little opportunity of talking to him, and on his presenting himself to her to say good-night, she had asked him very prettily to stay that she might have an opportunity of making his acquaintance. He had sat by her side at supper, but though such an occasion, with the curious sense of freedom it produces, is eminently calculated to create a rapid friendliness, it is not conducive to keenness of critical perception, and it is more than doubtful whether Valentine's impressions of Mr. Scudamore at the end were much more definite than they had been at the beginning. The party had been an unqualified success. Four or five hours of triumph is an intoxicating thing, and Valentine had given herself up to the excitement of the moment with an abandonment which was a new characteristic of hers. She held out her hand with a

charming smile as she spoke, and Mr. Scudamore answered:

"I should rather think I would! Many thanks, Miss Clinton. By Jove, my old friend Dorrisant is in luck."

It was by no means the reply that conventional good breeding demanded. It was characterised, as was the speaker's entire personality, by an excess of colour. Mr. Scudamore was a fair, florid man, with rather coarse features, grey eyes, and a burly figure; his voice was loud and a little rough; his phrases, as Valentine had thought once or twice with a smile at her stepfather's words as to his friend's want of polish, were distinctly vigorous; his clothes fitted him ill, and he wore too much jewellery. But there was a ring of unmistakeable earnest in his voice as he spoke his singularly chosen words, and the tone alone impressed itself on Valentine.

When an event which has created a good deal of preliminary excitement, becomes an accomplished fact, it is apt to leave a blank which the mind seeks instinctively to fill. Such a blank made itself felt in the house in Bruton Street, the dance being over; and the introduction of Mr. Scudamore upon the scene seemed to have been especially preordained to fill it. A new interest was wanted, and Mr. Scudamore, all the more by reason of what Mark Dorrisant called, with a smile, his "eccentricities," was installed in the vacant place so suddenly that he was a feature in the life of Valentine's house before a week had elapsed from his first visit there.

His old friend's stay in London would probably be a short one, Mark Dorrisant had told Valentine, and this was of course a reason for concentrating any attentions that were to be paid to him. It also threw the embellishing veil of transitoriness over intercourse with him. He had, on the same authority, few friends in London; and so it came about that hardly a day passed unmarked by an appointment that either brought him to Bruton Street, or brought Valentine and her escort to some more neutral meeting-place.

It is hardly possible to overrate the influence on subsequent perceptiveness of the mental attitude in which a new acquaintance is originally approached. Valentine's original attitude towards her stepfather's friend had not only been one of prejudice in his favour; it had presupposed certain superficial differences between him and her ordinary acquaintances, and had ascribed to him deep-rooted and less obvious ex-



cellencies. That first conversation with Mark Dorrisant on the subject of his friend had created in her mind, on sufficiently slight foundation, an idea of Mr. Scudamore to which she adapted all her subsequent impressions. Blemishes which would have utterly condemned any man introduced to her under ordinary circumstances—blemishes which for the stately, delicate "Queen Val" were as unpardonable crimes—were unconsciously condoned by her in Scudamore with one of those complete relaxations of all standards in favour of an individual which can never be exhibited except by the daintily autocratic in manners or morals, and which are proportionately perplexing.

It was, perhaps, another illustration of the law of first impressions that Geoffrey did not take to Mr. Scudamore. Geoffrey's first impression of that gentleman had been received before any knowledge of his relation with his guardian had been present in his mind to colour that impression; he had recognised him instantly as the man he had noticed in the Park "staring at Val," as he put it, and the effect that stare had produced on him was not to be obliterated. He never alluded to the subject again, and never gave expression to his sentiments towards his guardian's friend; he only dropped into the background when Scudamore was of the party, and became unusually quiet.

Three weeks passed by, and twice Valentine had "honoured him," to use Scudamore's own phrase, by becoming his guest with Mrs. Carryl, Mark Dorrisant, and Geoffrey at dinner at one of the big restaurants, and at a theatre afterwards; and on each occasion she had found on her plate a bouquet which was a miracle of costliness and beauty.

"One can't have too much of a good thing, Miss Clinton, eh?" he would say when, as often happened, he appeared at the house in Bruton Street laden with flowers. And Valentine would accept his offering graciously; taking the rather too obvious homage of her stepfather's old friend as a pleasant matter of course, and treating him with a charming mixture of patronage and kindness.

At the end of the three weeks there came the New Year, and with the New Year there came to Valentine, "with Robert Scudamore's best wishes," a magnificent diamond bracelet. Whether it was the present in itself, whether it was anything Scudamore said to her when she returned

it to him with a proud little speech as to the impossibility of her accepting it, or whether it was simply a dawning realisation of the fact that Mr. Scudamore by no means considered her merely as his old friend's stepdaughter, it is impossible to say, but from that time her manner to him changed. It became uncertain and capricious.

Scudamore had begun to let fall hints that he thought of settling in London "for the present," and one morning, during the morning ride in which he invariably joined, some words of his to this effect, spoken with a good deal of intention to Valentine, resulted in a pronounced access of haughty contradiction on her part. It was in the afternoon of the same day that Dorrisant, coming into the drawing-room at three o'clock, found Mrs. Carryl there alone.

He smiled pleasantly, and spoke casually about the weather, as he strolled up to the fire. She answered him with shy eagerness, lifting a pair of admiring eyes to his face. From the first, Mark Dorrisant had treated his stepdaughter's companion with a kindly deference which never failed, and which was as absolutely consistent with itself as it was inconsistent with its object. To Mrs. Carryl, in consequence, he was the most perfect being the world contained.

"Where is Valentine?" he said idly, when they had chatted together for a few minutes.

"I don't quite know," said Mrs. Carryl nervously. "I've not seen her since lunch. She—I'm afraid she was rather annoyed about something."

Valentine's demeanour had left no doubt on that score, and Mark Dorrisant smiled slightly at Mrs. Carryl's words. Mrs. Carryl, vaguely conscious of encouragement, went on with timid venturesomeness:

"Mr. Scudamore did not come back with you to-day?"

"No," answered Dorrisant, with another smile. "Poor old Scudamore, he had had rather a bad time."

Mrs. Carryl glanced up at him with a look of tentative comprehension on her face; but she did not speak. She had always a guilty feeling in discussing Valentine.

There was a pause, and then the smile died on Mark Dorrisant's lips, and an expression of gravity settled on his face.

"Things are not going well," he said thoughtfully. "Between Valentine and poor Scudamore, I mean, of course. I hoped they would have settled matters by this time."

He spoke as though the relations between

Valentine and Mr. Scudamore were a recognised fact, and Mrs. Carryl let her work fall in her lap as she lifted a startled face to his. It was the first time the subject had been put into words, and her own hazy perceptions, which had only begun to dawn in the course of the last two or three days, had by no means reached that stage of development assumed by Mark Dorrisant's speech. He paused as though to give her time to take in his words, and then continued seriously and confidentially:

"I was immensely surprised at first, I need not tell you. On the surface it did not seem at all likely that Scudamore would attract a girl like Valentine, or, to tell you the truth, that she was at all the kind of girl to attract him. I don't think that anything has ever given me greater pleasure than to see how it was with both of them."

"With both of them?" murmured Mrs. Carryl vaguely. "Then you really think that Valentine——"

"I don't think she has left us much room for doubt," returned Mark Dorrisant, with another smile. "She has given him every encouragement, and we are not going to insult her by thinking that she would have done so unless she—liked him."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Carryl feebly, for the first time recognising Valentine's conduct of the past weeks as encouragement, and wondering helplessly why she had not thought of it in that light before.

"No," continued Mark Dorrisant decidedly, "there can be no doubt that she likes him; there is every reason for it," he added, "for Scudamore's is a thoroughly sterling character. But that only makes her present capriciousness the more difficult to explain." He paused again, staring thoughtfully down at the rug. Then he said very slowly: "Did it ever occur to you, Mrs. Carryl, that Valentine had some sort of girlish affection for that agent of hers, Kenneth Gaunt?"

"Mr. Gaunt!" exclaimed Mrs. Carryl, in profound astonishment. "Oh, surely not! Oh, no, really! Why, they quarrelled dreadfully."

"It sometimes happens," said Mark Dorrisant, in the same slow, significant manner, "that a girl like our dear Queen Val, accustomed to homage and subservience, is attracted by sheer force of novelty to a man who, as you put it, quarrels with her. I don't suggest for a moment that he ever thought of her. On the contrary, I have good reason to know that he entertained a violent dislike for her; but I am convinced

that she created in herself a romantic attachment for him. I became aware of it when—well, at a time I do not care to talk about."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mrs. Carryl helplessly. "Oh, dear me!"

"Now, Valentine is exceptionally constant," pursued Dorrisant, "and I personally have no doubt that it is loyalty to this imaginary feeling on her part that is urging her to inflict so much pain on poor Scudamore—and on herself. It is most unfortunate! I should have thought she would have had too much pride——"

He broke off and walked to the window, followed by Mrs. Carryl's bewildered eyes. She was far too confused for speech. Mark Dorrisant said no more. He stood there looking out of window, holding Mrs. Carryl's thoughts to the subject—even had they been inclined to stray, which they were not—by his apparent absorption in it.

At last, after a long silence, he turned abruptly back towards the fire, as the door opened and Valentine came into the room. She was looking very disdainful, very imperious, and rather pale.

Mark Dorrisant was going out, he said, and after a minute or two he went away, leaving the two women alone together.

His departure was followed by a silence. Mrs. Carryl had taken up her work on Valentine's entrance with a guilty start, and was putting uncertain stitches into it, her whole appearance conveying an impression of startled preoccupation. Valentine wandered restlessly about the room. At last the latter sat down in a low chair.

"It's a hateful afternoon, Marion!" she exclaimed irritably.

Instead of answering her, evidently hardly hearing her, Mrs. Carryl lifted her weak little face for a moment, with an unusual excitement on it, and said:

"Don't you think that Mr. Scudamore is much nicer than Mr. Gaunt?"

Valentine had been leaning carelessly back in her chair. As the last word came from Mrs. Carryl's lips, the half-smile with which she had listened died on her lips, and her hand clenched itself round the arm of her chair. There was a moment's dead silence, and Mrs. Carryl looked frightened. Then Valentine moved, stretched out her hand deliberately for a fire-screen, and said carelessly:

"What a very extraordinary question, Marion!" Her voice was a little hard.

Mrs. Carryl's alarm subsided slightly. Not having been justified by results it

proved absolutely stimulating, and left a sensational desire to experience the feeling of crisis again. With great daring she began again, ignoring Valentine's comment.

"You haven't taken a dislike to Mr. Scudamore, have you?" she said tentatively.

Valentine turned the fire-screen in her hand, and the faintest touch of colour came into her face.

"Why should I take a dislike to him?" she said. Her indifference was rather excessive.

"That's just it!" said Mrs. Carryl, preparing with timid excitement to venture further. "He isn't the sort of man one could get to dislike when once one knows him, is he? He—he has such a sterling character, hasn't he? But you haven't seemed to like him so much lately."

"I think we won't discuss Mr. Scudamore, please, Marion!"

At any other time the coldly spoken words would have reduced Mrs. Carryl to abject silence, and possibly to tears. But this afternoon, between the mental thrill of the new idea presented to her by Mark Dorriant, and her own sense of unparalleled daring in having opened the subject with Valentine at all, she was absolutely impervious to them.

"I am very sorry for him, poor man," she went on, with an uneven kind of courage in her voice. "You did encourage him at first, didn't you——"

She was interrupted. With a cry of indignation and astonishment Valentine started to her feet, and stood looking down on her, her eyes flashing, her hand clenched fiercely round the screen.

"Encourage him!" she cried. "Marion, how dare you!"

Like many another timid person spurred on to a fictitious daring, Mrs. Carryl had lost all sense of proportion, and had said a really audacious thing almost without being aware of it. Frightened out of her wits now by the storm she had raised, but still too far carried out of her ordinary self for her ordinary submission, she proceeded to defend herself wildly and incoherently.

"I can't help it!" she cried. "You did encourage him, Valentine—every one will tell you you did. It isn't my fault. And if you are drawing off now because of Mr. Gaunt, that isn't my fault either. Only I think it's a dreadful pity when he's such a nice man—and Mr. Gaunt was horrid, and besides, he never cared for you at all, and Mr. Scudamore——"

Valentine had listened to her words so far with an astounded expression. She felt much as though a very tame canary had suddenly flown in her face. But when Mrs. Carryl came to her words about Kenneth Gaunt that expression changed suddenly into another, indefinable in the multiplicity of emotions it suggested, except for the outraged pride with which her eyes were filled, and which grew in them until she suddenly stretched out her hand, and laid it on Mrs. Carryl's with a touch that reduced that foolhardy little woman to quivering sobs and tears.

"Do you mean to say," said Valentine, "that you think I ever thought twice about Mr. Gaunt?"

"Oh, I am very sorry, Valentine!" sobbed Mrs. Carryl; her fictitious courage all gone, her native timidity returned with a violent reaction to make of her an abject heap of misery. "I didn't mean to vex you, indeed I didn't."

"Do you think it?"

"Why, there must be some reason for the way you treat Mr. Scudamore, and if you cared for Mr. Gaunt——"

"I didn't care for Mr. Gaunt! I never thought of him. I cared for justice, that was all."

Sharp and ringing the denial had come, with a defiance in it far fiercer than was needed to subdue Mrs. Carryl. It was succeeded by a pause, broken only by the sound of Mrs. Carryl's feeble sobs, and then Valentine said in a quick, excited voice:

"Does any one else think this? My stepfather?"

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Carryl tearfully. "Oh, don't be vexed, Valentine! What else could any one think?"

The handle of the fire-screen snapped suddenly in Valentine's fingers. She threw the pieces fiercely from her, and began to walk up and down the room with impetuous steps, her face alight and working with excitement.

"I'm very sorry, Valentine!" wept Mrs. Carryl.

At that most inopportune moment the door opened with no warning sound of footsteps on the softly carpeted landing outside, and the footman announced:

"Mr. Scudamore!"

And Mr. Scudamore followed his name so promptly, that Mrs. Carryl had barely time to flee by the door at the other end of the double drawing-room before his burly presence was in the room.

At the first sound of the footman's

announcement Valentine stopped abruptly in her walk, and a strange wave of colour rushed over her face. It passed, and left her eyes flashing still, but with a light of sudden resolution. She turned quickly and met Mr. Scudamore with her hand outstretched, and her sweetest smile.

"I am so glad to see you," she said graciously. "Have you come to see me or my stepfather? I'm afraid he is out, but if I shall do——" she broke off with an irresistible smile and pointed carelessly to a seat.

Mr. Scudamore had made his appearance with a boisterous appearance of ease, which was suggestive of distinct want of ease. A shade of anxiety, almost amounting to nervousness, had been visible in his rough features. For a moment the reception accorded to him seemed to place him completely at a loss, and his greeting, as he shook hands with an enthusiasm hardly compatible with a second meeting in one day, was more or less incoherent. Then he seated himself, awkwardly enough, in the chair pointed out to him.

"I'm awfully glad to find you like this, Miss Clinton," he said brusquely. "I was afraid I'd offended you."

Valentine laughed gently, and sat down. Her cheeks were very flushed.

"I'm afraid I was cross," she said graciously. "I hope I wasn't very rude? I'm so sorry."

"You weren't cross," was Scudamore's prompt, if somewhat rough, disclaimer. "And I'd do with you a great deal ruder to have you—to have you like this afterwards."

"You see, I'm rather spoilt," said Valentine, smiling at him, and apparently hardly heeding his words. "I have always had my own way—and I like it."

"Why, of course; you would, you know," assented Scudamore eagerly. "You're the kind of girl who ought to have her own way."

His countenance by this time was positively radiant. Perhaps it was the effect of reaction from the uncertainty in which he had entered the room; or perhaps it was the sense of contrast between her past mood and the mood in which she now met him, but something seemed to create in him a kind of excitement and elation. He paused a moment, and then leant suddenly forward, his face very red and eager.

"Miss Clinton," he began, "I've got something to say to you."

The colour died suddenly out of Valentine's face, her very lips whitened, and she rose impulsively and rang the bell.

"We'll have some tea," she said breathlessly. "And Mrs. Carryl will like to see you. I'll send for her."

#### CHAPTER XIV. AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

A WEEK passed by. The last days of January ran out in alternations of fog and rain, and the first of February brought with it uncertain gleams of sunshine, that seemed by contrast like a promise of spring itself.

Mrs. Carryl's temporary insanity—her conduct in daring Valentine's displeasure seemed to her, as she looked back on it, nothing less—was never alluded to. Its superficial effects were traceable in the deprecating timidity of the culprit's manner, and in a slight coldness in Valentine's manner towards her.

But to every one else Valentine was unusually sweet and gracious during that week. She was very bright, and very light hearted, even a little unnaturally so.

For Mr. Scudamore she had always her most charming smile, and he basked in that smile as if it were to him the rays of the sun. Only she avoided being left alone with him, sometimes seeming to rebel against the idea almost involuntarily.

It was part of the excitability which had become characteristic of her, that on the morning of the first of February she came down to breakfast full of enthusiasm on the subject of Geoffrey's birthday. It was a subject that had dropped somewhat out of sight in the newer and originally apparently temporary interest of Mr. Scudamore. Geoffrey himself, however, having had very little interest in Mr. Scudamore's society, had had more leisure to give to the consideration of his own future. The first sign of Valentine's interest that morning was quite enough to draw him into eager and confidential talk. Directly after breakfast he followed Valentine into her morning-room, and established himself so that he could look up into her face as she sat at her writing-table. And meeting his eager, anxious eyes, Valentine laid down her pen.

It was nearly half-past eleven; they had been talking for more than an hour.

Geoffrey had set forth his plans with a manliness and thoughtfulness new to him, and born of the sense of responsibility



which had gradually grown up in him; and Valentine, as he talked, had lost something of her restless brightness, and, as she grew more sympathetic, had grown graver and gentler. She had discussed his ideas with him, had drawn him out to enlarge upon all his theories, and at last the subject was practically exhausted, and a silence ensued. It was broken by Geoffrey. He threw himself luxuriously back against the sofa, clasped his hands behind his head, and said contentedly:

"This is like old times, Val."

She started slightly, and turned her face towards him with a vague smile, as he went on, boyishly:

"We haven't had a morning like this for ages, have we? It's most awfully jolly!"

The room in which they were was at the front of the house, and from where she sat Valentine could see into the street below. She was gazing down with dreamy eyes when, quite suddenly, she started; a hot colour rushed over her face, and she rose and rang the bell peremptorily. Taken by surprise Geoffrey looked at her enquiringly as she stood waiting for the servant's appearance, but she did not speak until her summons was answered.

"I am not at home," she said then imperiously. "Not at home to any one, mind!"

A fitful gleam of sunshine was lighting up the street, and underneath the windows its watery rays fell on two horses, one of which carried a groom, while from the other a large red-moustached figure was dismounting.

The servant left the room, and Valentine turned once more to Geoffrey, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining.

"I think I must go out, Geoff," she said abruptly. "It's a shame to waste the sunshine, and I want to see about your birthday present."

"I'm coming with you, then," he said, starting up with a laugh. "Coming to see what it is, Val!"

"Coming with me!" she returned, laughing rather excitedly. "You'll do no such thing, sir! I'm going alone. Good-bye—till we meet again. I don't quite know when that will be. I shan't be at home to lunch, and I'm engaged all the afternoon; and then you're going out to dinner, aren't you? But till whenever it is—good-bye!"

And with a gay little gesture of farewell she disappeared.

She spent nearly an hour in a round of shopping, throwing herself into her occupation with a feverish energy and excitement. And when, at the end of that time, she gave her coachman the order to drive to one of the large jewellers in Regent Street, there were tired lines about the pretty, spirited mouth. She ordered the set of studs which was to be her birthday present to Geoffrey, and turned to leave the shop.

She had just passed out on to the pavement when suddenly she stopped short; stopped as though she had been transfixed where she stood, her face quite white, her eyes fixed on the approaching figure of a man. It was Kenneth Gaunt.

He was coming along rapidly, looking neither to the right nor the left, and he did not see her. He was in the act of passing her, still not seeing her, when she moved forward impulsively and held out her hand.

"How do you do?" she said in a low, quick voice.

With a start so violent that he almost seemed to exclaim, though no word passed his lips, Kenneth Gaunt stopped short abruptly and stared into the white face before him as though he were looking at a ghost. For that one moment every drop of blood seemed to recede from his face. Then it came slowly back again, a deep sullen red, and he took the hand held out to him, almost reluctantly.

"How do you do, Miss Clinton?" he said, and he said it ungraciously enough.

Having shaken hands he made a movement as if to pass on, but Valentine stopped him. Her eyes were fixed upon his face; they had grown wide and pitiful, and her lips trembled as she spoke.

Kenneth Gaunt's appearance was greatly changed since the days when he had gone about at Templecombe a prosperous and well satisfied young man. It was not strange that he should show no signs of desiring to prolong an interview with any one who had known him then. He was shabbily dressed, and he was keenly conscious as he stood before Miss Clinton of the deficiencies of his appearance; but his face told far more than did his worn coat. It was the face of a man who had passed through the cruellest process to which youth and hope can be subjected; that process of continual failure and disappointment which makes those two hard elements of human life seem normal and inevitable. The features were haggard and sharpened;

the mouth was set into a sullen endurance, and the eyes held a fierce bitterness. All that air of well-being which had been such a conspicuous feature with him had disappeared.

"I—I am very glad to see you," said Valentine, faltering in most unusual fashion. Then, drawing up her head with a stately movement, which was an outward sign of the effort with which she mastered herself, she went on with that dignity with which a woman covers so much, not only from others, but from herself. "Are you living in London now?"

"Yes," answered Kenneth curtly, "at present."

His eyes were fixed on her now with a longing gaze in them of which Valentine only saw the bitterness, and she said, with something of an effort:

"Will you tell me what you are doing?"

Kenneth laughed harshly.

"It's easily told," he said bitterly.

"Nothing, Miss Clinton."

"Have you done nothing since——"

"Nothing," he returned. "There doesn't appear to be any demand, even in London, for doubtful characters. I imagine the market is overstocked."

"Oh, don't!" cried Valentine. "Don't!"

He had lifted his hat, and moved to leave her, but her words arrested him perforce. He turned his worn young face to her once more and paused.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Clinton," he said gently. "You were always more than just to me, and it was an abominable thing to say to you. May I put you into your carriage?"

Valentine made no answer. Her fingers closed on a little parcel that she held so tightly that its contents were crushed and spoiled. She turned and walked mechanically to her brougham, got in, and allowed Kenneth to close the door for her. Then he shook hands with her in silence, and the carriage drove off.

And Valentine leant back in her place, her face set and proud; oblivious of the noise of Regent Street, oblivious of the fine, drizzling rain that was beginning to fall, saying to herself, again and again:

"I am just to him; only just to him."

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### MR. SCUDAMORE IS ACCEPTED.

It was seven o'clock in the evening, and Valentine was standing in the morning-room. It still wanted more than half an

hour to dinner-time, but Valentine was dressed, and rather magnificently dressed, for she was going later with Mrs. Carryl to a large "at home" at a very smart house.

The magnificence suited her stately young figure to perfection; the way in which her hair was dressed seemed to accentuate the curve of her neck, and the jewels in it seemed the natural setting for the proud, delicate face. It was a very proud face this evening and very pale, and her pose, as she stood with one small foot on the fender, was defiant in its haughtiness. She was apparently waiting, for she turned expectantly when the door opened and Mark Dorrisant came in.

He was also in evening dress. He and Geoffrey were going together to dine with a friend—a Mr. Everett, in Hyde Park Gardens.

"You wanted to speak to me, Queen Val," he said. "I have finished dressing with all speed accordingly; for we must be off in about ten minutes."

"Thank you," she answered. "Yes, I do want to speak to you, please."

Her manner was rather unusual. She had smiled as he opened the door, but her tone was rather distant.

He glanced at her, and then quietly waited for her to speak.

Without any circumlocution she began at once, her voice firm and unhesitating.

"I want to speak to you about Mr. Gaunt," she said. "I am very sorry to give you pain—perhaps I thought more of that than of justice—but something must be done!"

She spoke with a calmness too lofty for perfect reality, and Mark Dorrisant listened with his eyes on her face, a quick flash leaping into them on her first words, to be instantly subdued into a deeper gravity. There was an instant's pause as she stopped, and then before he answered her he averted his eyes from her face. And as he did so the faintest tinge of colour touched Valentine's pale cheeks.

"I am afraid I must ask you to explain," he said gently.

"Mr. Gaunt's prospects in life have been utterly ruined while he was in my service. I, myself, by a most unfortunate chain of circumstances, played a large part in bringing about a ruin founded on injustice and mistake. It is my duty, from every point of view, to see that something is done to make amends."

She paused, but Mark Dorrisant did not speak. He was gazing steadily down at

the fire, his handsome face very grave. And Valentine, touched by his silence, went on affectionately:

"Pater," she said, "I know you only did what you thought right. I can't bear to oppose you. But you can't prove his guilt any more than I can prove—than his innocence can be proved, and is it just that a man's life should be spoilt on such terms?"

She paused abruptly, and Dorrisant lifted his eyes and looked at her. The colour deepened in her cheeks; her face, which had softened into pleading as she spoke, set itself into prouder lines than before, and she went on:

"I have spoken to you about it because I want you to see Mr. Gaunt and find out how we can help him. He can get nothing to do. That is our fault, and something must be done!"

Dorrisant looked at her again.

"Have you seen him?" he said quickly.

Valentine stretched out one beautiful bare arm and clasped her fan as it lay on the mantelpiece. The white fingers shook, but it was with no gentle emotion. Her eyes were blazing.

"I met him to-day in Regent Street!" she said haughtily.

Mark Dorrisant turned away, as if with an impulse of most delicate consideration, and looked at her no more. The colour in her cheeks became a burning crimson; then it ebbed away and left her face quite white. Looking straight at him, and seeming to keep herself still by an intense effort of which the strain of that outstretched arm was an outward sign, she said:

"I cannot tell you where he lives, but you will be able to find him, of course! Will you go to him, please, and see what can be done?"

Mark Dorrisant turned, and took her hand with gentle force into both his own.

"I would do anything to please you, Valentine!" he said gravely. "But there are more reasons than one why I cannot do that."

He released her hand and turned towards the door. Valentine made no effort to detain him; apparently all her force was absorbed in the tumult of passionate sensation with which her white face was eloquent—outraged pride, wounded self-respect, passionate denial—for she stood there perfectly motionless.

A few moments passed and then the sound of Geoffrey's voice, as he answered Mark Dorrisant's call, followed instantly by

the closing sound of the street-door, as the two set out for their dinner-party together, all fell on Valentine's ears clearly, but without making any impression on her consciousness.

The dinner-bell rang at last. Valentine roused herself, crossed the room with a strange expression on her face, and went downstairs.

All through dinner she hardly spoke, and that absorbed expression never altered; Mrs. Carryl, after receiving several monosyllabic answers, decided feebly that "Valentine was angry about something." The expression was on her pale face still, when she was received by her hostess, some two hours later, and passed on into a crowded drawing-room.

"How do you do, Miss Clinton?"

The speaker was Mr. Scudamore, presenting an imposing array of white shirt-front to the public gaze, and as she turned with a slight start at the sound of his voice, Valentine's face changed for the first time, and a light came into her eyes.

"How do you do?" she said, holding out her hand eagerly, and smiling at him. "What a hot room, isn't it? Have you been here long?"

Valentine had herself introduced Mr. Scudamore to their hostess, so his presence could have been no surprise to her. Nevertheless, there was a certain excitement about her only attributable to some sudden emotion. Scudamore looked at her shining eyes with his own full of admiration, and then said, apparently as a daring and hopeless experiment:

"Let us go on into the conservatory; it's ever so much cooler there."

She hesitated an instant, then she turned to him with a quick movement.

"Yes, Mr. Scudamore," she said, "I think the conservatory sounds very attractive."

She turned as she spoke and walked away by his side, her eyes brighter than ever. Her progress through the room was rather a long business, since she had to exchange greetings with acquaintances at every step; but she pursued her way steadily, never allowing herself to get separated from the burly figure which followed her with dogged persistency, and in the course of time they reached the curtained entrance which led into the conservatory, and through which could be seen a vista of tall palms and ferns, occupied by only some half-dozen figures. Without an instant's pause or hesitation Valentine crossed the threshold. There was no one whom

she knew in sight, and she and Scudamore were practically alone.

"Suppose we sit down?" he suggested.

His voice was uneven as though with some unusual excitement, and his florid face was flushed.

"It would be rather nice," assented Valentine.

There was a touch of excitement about her, too, and the ribbon of her fan was twisted tightly round her fingers. At the farther end of the conservatory there was a seat behind a huge mass of palms. Towards this Scudamore moved, and she moved by his side, the light on her face growing more defiant—self-defiant, it seemed. She sat down, Scudamore seated himself beside her, and there was a silence. She made no attempt to break it, and at last Scudamore said abruptly:

"Miss Clinton, I don't suppose there's any need for me to beat about the bush much, and I'm not likely to get a better opportunity than this. I set my mind on having you for my wife the first moment that I saw you." He paused, and then added brusquely, with a fierce passion in his rough voice: "Is it to be 'yes' or 'no'?"

Almost before the words were uttered, Valentine turned to him, her face as white as the feathers of her fan, and held out her hand.

"It is 'yes,'" she said, in a low voice. Then, as he made a rough movement as if to draw her to him, she rose with a strange, strangled laugh.

"I think—not here!" she said.

There had been a strange ring of triumph in her laugh, and the same triumph was gleaming in her eyes as she and Scudamore passed back into the drawing-room together.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### MR. GEOFFREY IS FORGOTTEN.

MR. SCUDAMORE was resplendently dressed, in his usual florid taste, when he stood on the doorstep of the house in Bruton Street on the following morning. He carried a large bouquet, and he had, apparently, a smaller and more precious object in his waistcoat pocket, for he was in the act of feeling therein for the third time when the door was opened to him. Mr. Scudamore and the bouquet were shown into the empty drawing-room, and, left alone, he walked absently across the room, to where a large coloured photograph of

Valentine stood upon a table, and stood staring at it, and fingering that small object in his waistcoat pocket. There was a curious mixture of expressions in his face this morning. The triumph and satisfaction of an accepted suitor were there, roughly enough written on his rough features; but beneath there was a shamefaced uneasiness that was almost compunction. He had not been alone for many seconds when the door opened quickly. Scudamore looked up as quickly. But it was not Valentine who entered; it was Mark Dorrisant.

It was suggestive of a complete understanding of some sort between Mark Dorrisant and his old friend, that neither attempted to shake hands. Scudamore turned sharply round where he stood, and contented himself with a nod. Dorrisant dispensed with any salutation at all.

"Well," he said, "it's through."

The words in themselves were extraordinarily curt, but even their form was not so utterly unlike the Mark Dorrisant his stepdaughter knew as was the tone in which they were spoken; it was hard, matter-of-fact, entirely unsympathetic, and his face was, like it, essentially hard and capable-looking. He was very pale, though, and there was something about his eyes which, if it was not his usual expression—and it certainly was not—was not exactly consistent with the business-like decision of his present look and manner. They were preoccupied and intent, and suggested that he was by no means concentrated on the matter in hand.

Mr. Scudamore, however, had apparently no attention to spare for any peculiarities about his friend. He met Dorrisant's eyes for a moment, and then he shifted his gaze restlessly and uncomfortably, and that shamefaced air increased distinctly.

"Yes," he muttered, "I suppose so."

Dorrisant's eyes seemed to concentrate themselves with a quick effort on the sullen figure before him, and he said sharply:

"Are you not satisfied?"

The other man hesitated.

"Oh, yes," he growled. "It's all right enough; but I never felt what a brute I am before."

Dorrisant laughed a cynical and most astonished laugh, and then that strange intentness on something else came suddenly back into his eyes as a touch fell on the handle of the door. It opened, and



Valentine stood on the threshold. And as his eyes fell on her, Mark Dorrisant's face changed completely.

"Ah!" he exclaimed tenderly, "here she is."

Valentine was very pale. She was wearing a dark cloth frock, from which her bright hair and delicate face stood out in dainty distinctness. There were shadows about the curiously unflinching eyes, and there were resolute lines about her mouth which seemed in some mysterious way to take away her youth. She put out her left hand to her stepfather as he came up to her with a little affectionate gesture, and then as Scudamore advanced, clumsily enough, she gave him her right hand, saying simply:

"Good morning."

Dorrisant smiled pleasantly.

"Well," he said, "I will be off. Unfortunately, I've a business engagement which will keep me out to lunch. You won't miss me, though, I dare say." He paused, and then drew Valentine gently to his side. "You've chosen the best fellow in the world, Queen Val," he said tenderly. "I think he almost deserves his luck, and I can't say more than that, as I've been telling him."

He kissed her gently on the forehead, and turned, evidently to shake hands with his friend. But Mr. Scudamore had turned his back abruptly, his modesty apparently wounded by even such delicate singing of his praises, and with an affectionate smile, Mark Dorrisant left the room.

His departure was succeeded by a silence. Valentine moved to the fire, and bent towards it, holding her hands mechanically to the blaze, her lips white and compressed. Scudamore still stood by the table fumbling with his bouquet. At last, with a sudden effort, he laid it roughly on the table, put his hand once more into his waistcoat pocket, drew out a small jeweller's case, and went awkwardly across the room to the slender figure by the fire.

"You did mean what you said last night, didn't you?" he said clumsily. "I'm not fit to black your boots. I feel as if it couldn't be true—as if, by Heaven! it oughtn't to be true! I——" He hesitated and stopped.

She had raised her head on his approach, and was standing now turned towards him, looking in the quiet self-surrender of her expression lovelier than she had ever looked in her life. All her delicate gracefulness was heightened by contrast with the rough

figure before her, and, as if the sense of her beauty was stealing gradually over him, there dawned in the man's eyes, and grew there, a fierce and passionate admiration. He opened the jewel-case hastily, and went on in another tone.

"After all, I don't suppose I'm worse than most," he said bolsterously. "The best of us would seem a baddish lot to you, I take it. And, of course, I know you meant it. Look here, I've brought you a ring."

He took the ring in question from its case and held it towards her. There seemed to be some kind of struggle going on within him, and there was in his face a diffidence very strange to see in so rough a man.

It was a very handsome marquise ring of diamonds, and Valentine looked at it for an instant in silence. Then she looked up at the giver, and held out her left hand to him.

"Thank you," she said gently. "It is beautiful."

Then, as he took her hand into his own, which shook a little, and slipped the ring on to the slender finger, a burning flush swept over her face, leaving it paler than before.

Mr. Scudamore put the ring in its place, and still holding her hand, glanced nervously from it to her face.

"It isn't a bad ring, is it?" he said, with a poor attempt at swaggering ease; "won't you pay me for it?"

For an instant Valentine hesitated, and shrank back involuntarily. His face was very close to hers, and his eyes were eager. Then she bent towards him, and lifted her white cheek as a child might have done. Whether it was the absolute simplicity of the movement, or whether it was a sudden supreme assertion of that singular diffidence, he could not have told, but Scudamore found himself suddenly arrested. He had been conscious of a vague intention of taking her into his arms and kissing that lovely face to his heart's content, but now he found that he could not carry his intention into effect. He bent down, still holding her hand in his, and kissed her on the cheek gently, almost reverently.

A moment later and the luncheon-bell was ringing; she had drawn her hand gently away, and he was cursing himself for having let his moment slip.

"Shall we go down?" said Valentine; there was a new kindness for him in her voice if he could have appreciated its cadence. "Mrs. Carryl will be waiting."

She opened the door as she spoke to find Mrs. Carryl just crossing the landing on her way downstairs. The little woman's timid congratulations were boisterously claimed by Scudamore, who seemed bent on demonstrating his perfect ease to the world at large, and Valentine was just following them into the dining-room—Scudamore's manners were not a strong point with him—when she was stopped by the footman.

"If you please, miss," he said, "could you tell me when Mr. Dorrisant will be in?"

"I don't know," answered Valentine; "not until late in the afternoon, I think," and then as the man's face lengthened perceptibly, she added, "Why?"

"It's Mr. Geoffrey, miss," the man answered nervously. "If I'd known Mr. Dorrisant was going out I'd have spoken to him before he went. I've just been up again, miss, and it doesn't seem as if I could make him hear."

"Mr. Geoffrey?" repeated Valentine incomprehendingly. And then, with a sudden flash of understanding, she added quickly: "Do you mean that Mr. Geoffrey is not up yet?"

"That's it, miss," was the anxious answer. "He didn't answer when I called him this morning, and Mr. Dorrisant said not to disturb him as he had a headache last night, and you know he often does lie in bed late, miss."

"And when did you go to him again?" said Valentine anxiously.

The man coughed deprecatingly.

"Well, miss," he said, "I'm very sorry to say as I forgot him. He flashed across me all of a sudden just about twelve, and I went up and knocked, but he didn't answer; Mr. Dorrisant was in the drawing-room then, miss, and I didn't like to intrude, and I just went downstairs for a minute to speak to Wilson."

Miss Clinton's probable engagement had been a much-discussed topic in her household for the last two or three weeks. Mr. Scudamore's early appearance that morning had rendered it a far more engrossing subject than Mr. Geoffrey's possible indisposition.

"And Mr. Dorrisant must have gone out then, miss," the man went on. "I'm very sorry, I'm sure, miss; but I've just been knocking very loud, and I thought you ought to be told!"

The perspiration was standing on the man's embarrassed face, and he glanced,

as though instinctively seeking manly assistance, to where Scudamore stood with Mrs. Carryl just inside the dining-room door. Apparently that loud knocking of which he spoke, and the silence which had answered it, had shaken the man's nerves, for a curious atmosphere of dismay seemed to radiate from him, and envelope the little group.

"Suppose I go up and see?" suggested Scudamore, coming forward, and speaking to Valentine in tones of hasty reassurance, which were rather out of proportion to the simple facts as they stood. "Perhaps the young fellow is a bit off colour and can't speak up."

Valentine was pale, and her eyes were dilated—rather with an expectation of fear than with fear itself. She turned to him gratefully.

"Please!" she said, and Scudamore hastily went upstairs, followed by the footman. Their footsteps died away and there was a moment's dead silence. Mrs. Carryl, her small face white and terrified, stole up to Valentine as the latter stood with one hand resting on the balusters.

"Oh, Valentine!" she whispered, "oh, Valentine, I hope there is nothing the matter!"

Valentine turned upon her suddenly, her face quivering.

"No!" she cried, in a voice vibrating with excitement, but low as Mrs. Carryl's had been. "No! Why should there be anything the matter? Hark!" she caught Mrs. Carryl's arm tightly as she spoke, dropping her voice to a breathless whisper.

"Hark! they are knocking!"

Muffled by distance, but still audible, there came to them the sound of a series of loud raps struck upon a door; then a pause and then Scudamore's voice: "Cary, Cary! My good fellow, what's wrong? Cary!" Another pause, and then more and louder raps.

As if unable longer to bear the suspense, Valentine moved suddenly and went upstairs, followed by Mrs. Carryl.

The little woman only knew that she was afraid to go, and more afraid to stay alone. They passed up two flights of stairs, the knocking and the calls of "Cary, Cary!" "Mr. Geoffrey, sir!" growing more distinct and more alarmed, and then they came to the landing on which was Geoffrey's room. For the moment the noise had been succeeded by a dead silence, and the two women saw Scudamore bending down, his ear to the

key-hole, and his hand held up to enforce quiet on the two men-servants who stood behind him.

Then Scudamore became aware of Valentine's vicinity, and raising himself, came towards her, his florid face pale and disturbed.

"I'm afraid there is something wrong," he said. "We had better force the door, I think. Go downstairs, my dear Miss Clinton, and I will come to you directly. The poor boy has fainted, no doubt."

He tried to lead her to the stairs, but Valentine shook her head. Her face was ashen, and the dread with which her eyes had been full was now an agonised strain of anticipation.

"I can't," she said hoarsely. "Break open the door at once."

He looked at her doubtfully, and then, as if the circumstances were too pressing to allow of longer delay, he went back to the door before which the two men were standing now with faces whiter than his own. There was a hurried consultation, of which no words reached the two women as they stood—Valentine erect, her hands clasped tightly, her eyes never moving from that door; Mrs. Carryl, a shuddering figure, awed into silence broken only by an hysterical sob or two. Some tools were produced, and Scudamore knelt down in front of the door. There were some skilful strokes with a hammer, each one of which sent a thrill through each member of the breathless group around, and then Scudamore rose. The door was ajar. He said something to one of the men, and the latter followed him into the room. There was a moment's pause, breathless, awful, and Scudamore came out, and came to Valentine, his face shocked and horrified beyond description.

"Go downstairs, Miss Clinton," he said. "Go downstairs. This is no business for you."

"Tell me!" came from Valentine's white lips, and her eyes seemed to draw an answer from the man in spite of himself.

"The poor boy's gone!" he said. "He must have been dead for hours."

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### AN UNIMPORTANT WITNESS.

It was a bare, businesslike-looking room, with a long table in the middle of it. And grouped about the table were six people—Valentine, Scudamore, Mrs. Carryl, Mark Dorrisant, and, in the background, Valentine's two men-servants.

The room was that attached to the mortuary in which what had been Geoffrey Cary was lying. Those six people were there summoned by the coroner, and they were waiting now for the return of the coroner and the jury from their first duty—the viewing of the body.

On the right of the table was Valentine. Her face was worn and exhausted with emotion; but set into firm, proud lines of self-control, which left alive only her eyes, slightly dilated as if with horror. Next her was Mrs. Carryl, trembling, sobbing hysterically, and utterly impervious to the rough reassurance of Scudamore, who sat on her other side, nervous, pale, and subdued, throwing an occasional glance at Mark Dorrisant. And a glance at Mark Dorrisant was calculated to subdue the most careless. He sat motionless, his elbow on the table, his forehead on his hand, which was clenched until the muscles stood out like cords, and even the knuckles were whitened. Only an outline of his face could be seen, but that outline was so haggard that he might have sat for a statue of speechless woe.

They waited in unbroken silence until the sound of returning footsteps preceded the appearance of the coroner, the jury, and the doctor. There was a short pause while the coroner adjusted the notes before him and cleared his throat. He was a man with a bland manner and a not particularly intelligent face.

"The first evidence to be taken," he began, "is, necessarily, that upon the point of identification. Mr. Dorrisant—Mr. Mark Dorrisant, is, I believe, the witness on this matter?" He glanced at the motionless figure as he spoke, and there was another moment's pause. Then Mark Dorrisant lifted his head slowly, showing a face so sorrow-stricken that even the coroner's official blandness softened into something like sympathy.

"My name is Mark Dorrisant," he said quietly.

"You reside at 101, Bruton Street?"

"Yes."

"You have no occupation, I believe?"

"No. I returned to England from America in April last to establish my ward in London." His voice did not falter, but there was something about its steadiness more eloquent than a sob. Valentine's lips trembled, and Scudamore glanced hastily up at his friend, and then fixed his eyes once more on the table. Mrs. Carryl was crying now helplessly and continuously.

"You are prepared to identify the deceased as Geoffrey Cary, of 101, Bruton Street?"

"I am. He was my ward."

"You were the last person, I understand, to see the deceased alive. When was that, and under what circumstances?"

"He and I dined on the first of February, the day before he died, with Mr. Arthur Everett, of Hyde Park Gardens. We left his house at about a quarter past twelve, and I proposed that we should go together to our club. My ward complained of headache and decided to walk home. I walked with him to the top of Bruton Street before carrying out my own intention of walking to the 'Strangers,' and—that was the last time."

The feeble sobs which had shaken Mrs. Carryl's little figure hitherto with unbroken regularity, stopped suddenly, the trembling little figure became so still that it seemed as though her very breath was caught and held. Nobody noticed her. All eyes were concentrated on Dorrisant in the dignity of his great grief. At last one jurymen, who had apparently been surprised into emotion and resented the circumstance, said abruptly:

"It's a good walk from Hyde Park Gardens to the 'Strangers'."

Mark Dorrisant turned his eyes patiently upon the speaker. "I am a good walker," he said, "and I am fond of walking at night."

His manner was so simple and dignified that the half-suspicious comment of the jurymen seemed almost an insult; the tide of popular sympathy set strongly towards Dorrisant, and the coroner hastened to say:

"Quite so! You left this unfortunate young gentleman at the top of Bruton Street. You cannot be sure that he went straight home?"

"Unfortunately not," returned Mark Dorrisant. "I was very late in going home myself—it was three o'clock in the morning when I got in—and when I went to my room my ward's door was shut."

There was a choking gasp from the little figure between Valentine and Scudamore, and the hands which held her handkerchief began to shake like leaves. The gasp was very low, however. Only Valentine heard it, and she put her arm gently round Mrs. Carryl.

"Quite so," repeated the coroner. "You say that he complained of headache. Did he seem, otherwise, in his usual health and spirits?"

"He had been in excellent spirits all the evening," answered Mark Dorrisant in a low tone. "Mr. Everett, our host, and another gentleman who dined with us, are here, I see." He glanced as he spoke towards two men who had recently come in. "They will tell you."

"Ah!" said the coroner, glancing in the direction indicated. "Exactly. Thank you, Mr. Dorrisant; for the present that will do. Mr. Robert Scudamore, I believe, was the first to enter the room of the deceased?"

Mr. Robert Scudamore was then called upon to give a detailed account of the part he had played in the affair, of the general appearance of Geoffrey's bedroom when entered, and of Geoffrey himself—"the deceased," as that bright, happy vitality had now become. Scudamore's evidence being concluded, the coroner turned to the doctor.

"Perhaps you will give us your opinion now," he said, "as to the cause of death."

The doctor gave his opinion in a few brief sentences. Deprived of technicalities, it amounted to a statement that the deceased had been killed by a powerful and somewhat rare poison.

To no one present did the statement come absolutely as a surprise; and yet hardly any one heard it absolutely unmoved. Of those immediately concerned, Valentine's face became like a white mask in her effort at self-control. A stifled groan broke from Dorrisant, and Scudamore clutched at the table before him. Only Mrs. Carryl seemed to be utterly unmoved. Her face was still hidden, but she was not sobbing now, only trembling very much. The doctor's words were succeeded by an instant's dead silence, and then the coroner continued:

"You were called to the deceased at two o'clock on the afternoon of the second of February. You found him already dead?"

"I found him already dead," assented the doctor. "He had been dead, I should say, some twelve hours."

"That being the case, can you give us any idea as to when the poison was probably taken?"

"I believe that the quantity taken, as far as I have been able to estimate it, would take fatal effect in from one to two hours from the time it was swallowed. Consequently, I infer that in this case it was taken between twelve and one o'clock at night."



"Between twelve and one o'clock at night," repeated the coroner. "Thank you." Then as the doctor reseated himself, he continued, addressing the jury: "Gentlemen, everything that can be vouched for and sworn to in connection with the case, is now before you. The post-mortem examination finds the deceased to have died, as you have heard, of poison. By whose hand that poison was administered, whether by the unfortunate young man's own hand or by some other, has yet to be discovered. I shall now proceed to examine witnesses as to the circumstances and state of mind of the deceased, and I beg you to give your earnest attention to the evidence from which you will draw your own conclusions."

He had spoken very solemnly, and a hush of awe seemed to fall upon the room.

"Miss Clinton," said the coroner, breaking the silence gravely. "Miss Clinton." He turned to her courteously as he spoke. Valentine was waiting with glowing eyes and the same set, colourless face for his question. "Your name is Valentine Clinton?"

"Yes."

"You reside at 101, Bruton Street?"

"Yes."

"The deceased was no relation to you, I believe?"

"He is my stepfather's ward. We are not related."

"When did you last see the deceased?"

"On the morning of the first of February. We had a long talk about his prospects."

Valentine's voice was clear and distinct, her answers prompt and ready.

"What were his prospects?"

"He was to come of age on the twelfth of February. He was to come into a large fortune. He—he was very anxious to use it well, and we had a long talk."

Her voice faltered a little, and she stopped.

"He was in the habit of talking confidentially with you, then? You were good friends?"

"We were; he was like my brother."

"Now, Miss Clinton, please think carefully before you answer this question. Did the deceased ever, either on the morning of the first of February or on any previous occasion, say anything to you that might suggest any secret trouble—money trouble, love trouble, or what not?"

"Never," returned Valentine unhesitatingly. "He was perfectly happy, perfectly contented that morning. He was looking forward to his life with all his heart."

"Ah!" said the coroner. "And you parted that morning under what circumstances, Miss Clinton?"

"I was going out; I said good-bye to him in the morning-room, and went away. I heard him go out with my stepfather that evening, but I never saw him again."

"You cannot tell us, then, how he spent the day?"

"No."

"At what time did you go to bed that night?"

"It was about half-past eleven o'clock. I had been to a party, from which I came home early."

"Was the deceased at home when you went to bed?"

"No. He was not in the smoking-room—the only room left open—and as I and my friend, Mrs. Carryl, went upstairs we noticed that his bedroom door was open."

"Did you hear him come in subsequently?"

"No. His room and that of my stepfather are on the floor below mine. I very seldom hear them come upstairs. And my room is nearer to theirs than any other bedroom in the house. The servants could not possibly have heard, I am afraid."

She glanced round at the two footmen as she spoke, and the superior answered her eagerly.

"No, miss," he said. "The question has been put again and again in the servants' hall, and none of us heard nothing."

"Thank you, Miss Clinton. I need not trouble you any further, I think, unless any of these gentlemen have any questions to ask you."

"I should like to know," said a jurymen, "how it was nobody thought it odd that the young gentleman didn't show any sign of life all the morning?"

"We forgot him," said Valentine in a low voice. "I—we were all——"

"My stepdaughter became engaged that morning to Mr. Sudamore," interposed Mark Dorrisant.

The jurymen apologised somewhat hastily.

It becoming obvious at this stage in the proceedings that Mr. Everett and his friend were most anxious to deliver their testimony as to the good spirits of the deceased on the

evening before his death, the coroner proceeded to take it; and turning from them to Mark Dorrisant, he went on to question the latter closely as to his late ward's habits, and characteristics generally.

"It is always possible," said Mark Dorrisant at last, his voice shaking slightly for the first time, "it is always possible that my boy may have had secrets from me—troubles of which I know nothing. It is terribly painful to me to contemplate such a possibility, but I begin to understand that it must indeed be so."

"Then you can give us no clue as to any personal enemy of the deceased? You can tell us nothing more in any way bearing on this very mysterious event?"

"Nothing."

There was a moment's pause, and it was broken suddenly by Valentine. With her face flushing and paling by turns as if under the influence of irrepressible excitement, she said hurriedly:

"My stepfather forgets. There is something which I am sure should be considered. This is not the first time—I mean it is not the first time somebody has tried to murder Geoffrey. Last summer in the country he was shot."

There was a movement of immense excitement among the jury. The coroner stilling it, repeated gravely:

"He was shot. By whom, if you please, and under what circumstances?"

"It was never proved. It was in the dark. He was staying with me in Hertfordshire—he and my stepfather—and he was found one night in the park shot—nearly dead. The person who was suspected did not do it."

With a movement at once compassionate and dignified, Mark Dorrisant leant slightly forward, and the coroner turned to him instantly.

"I am afraid there is no clue here," he said in a low voice, as though anxious to spare Valentine. "The person who was suspected"—he glanced at Valentine—"is in London, I believe, but I am, morally speaking, certain that he and my boy had never met since—the other affair. The motives imputed to him then were merely transitory. He had quarrelled with my boy, and he was a passionate, hot-headed fellow."

"His name, if you please?"

"Mr. Kenneth Gaunt."

A police inspector who had been sitting next the doctor making a brief note now and then, wrote down the name rapidly, and held his pencil suspended with evident

eagerness as the coroner asked his next question.

"His address?"

"I do not know it."

"Miss Clinton?"

"I do not know it."

Valentine's voice was cold as ice. She had listened to her stepfather's words with an indescribable expression on her face and her very lips whitening.

"Was Mr. Kenneth Gaunt a fellow-guest with you and the deceased under Miss Clinton's roof?"

"No. Mr. Gaunt was my stepdaughter's agent."

"Were he and the deceased intimate?"

"They only met once—at a dinner-party given by my stepdaughter. Mr. Gaunt grossly insulted my boy. There was a painful scene, in fact. The next day my stepdaughter, who was naturally much annoyed, gave Mr. Gaunt to understand that she should no longer require his services. The young man lost his temper and made use of threatening expressions with regard to my ward, and on that same evening my boy was found, as you have heard, shot in the left side, with Mr. Gaunt's gun lying near him. The case came before the magistrates, of course; but my ward recovered, the evidence was purely circumstantial, and the case was dismissed."

The police inspector now leant across and spoke to the coroner in a low voice.

"Ah, yes," assented the coroner. Then, turning again to Mark Dorrisant, he continued: "You say you know this gentleman to be in London. Will you kindly tell us how you know it?"

Dorrisant hesitated for an instant.

"My stepdaughter chanced to meet him in Regent Street on the first of February," he said with evident reluctance.

The coroner turned to Valentine. What determined the form of his question he could not have said.

"I am afraid we must ask you to give us an account of the interview," he said.

With no movement of her still, proud face, looking straight before her and not at her questioner, Valentine answered instantly:

"I was going from a shop to my carriage. Mr. Gaunt came down the street. We shook hands. I asked him what he was doing. He told me that he could get nothing to do. I gathered that he was in London in search of employment."

Her words followed those of her stepfather into the inspector's note-book, and then the latter said to the coroner in a low

voice: "I should like a description of the gentleman, if you please, sir."

On a word from the coroner an accurate and telling description of Kenneth Gaunt was supplied by Mark Dorrisant.

A short pause ensued, during which the coroner conferred in low tones with the police inspector, and the jury talked in murmurs among themselves. Then the coroner drew himself up once more, and was opening his lips to deliver his final address to the jury, when his eye suddenly fell upon Mrs. Carryl. He glanced hurriedly at his notes. She figured there as a witness of the very slightest importance. Still, there she was. She had been called upon to appear at the inquest, and as a matter of form a question or two must be put to her. Therefore, instead of beginning his charge to the jury, he said:

"There is still one witness, gentlemen, whose evidence has not yet been taken. Mrs. Carryl!"

Mrs. Carryl was sitting with her face bent down, her nervous hands working tremulously at a fold of her gown. She had ceased to shed tears some time since, and had remained almost continually in that attitude, glancing up now and then at one speaker or another, and showing a dazed, tremulous little face. But as the coroner spoke her name, she started violently, and lifted her face suddenly. It was bewildered and terrified beyond expression.

"I—I——" she began almost wildly.

The coroner interposed reassuringly.

"Don't distress yourself, my dear madam, I beg. We have heard that you took luncheon with Mr. Dorrisant and the deceased on the first of February. Can you corroborate Mr. Dorrisant's assertion that the young gentleman was in good health and spirits on that occasion?"

"Yes."

The monosyllable was the merest frightened whisper.

"You came home with Miss Clinton at about half-past eleven o'clock at night, and the deceased was not then at home?"

"No."

"Then you never saw the deceased again after he left the dining-room after lunch?"

A choking, struggling sob broke from Mrs. Carryl, and Valentine laid her hand gently on her arm. The coroner repeated his question soothingly. There was a kind of struggle as it seemed for breath, and then a faint monosyllable, uttered, it appeared, almost involuntarily:

"No."

"And you did not hear him come home at night?"

"No."

The next instant Mrs. Carryl had collapsed helplessly on to Valentine's shoulder as the latter rose hurriedly and put an arm round her.

"Oh, Valentine!" she sobbed, "oh, Valentine, take me away! Take me away! It's so dreadful! Oh, poor Mr. Cary! Poor, poor Mr. Cary!"

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### VALENTINE ASKS FOR HELP.

"MR. SCUDAMORE is in the drawing-room, if you please, miss."

It was nine o'clock in the evening, and over the house there lay that curious hush which inevitably follows a crisis. Mrs. Carryl's agitation had ended in a series of hysterical attacks of far greater severity than those which had kept her in her room until the morning of the inquest. Valentine had only left her when, on her becoming comparatively quiet, she had gone down to dinner with her stepfather.

She paused for an instant as the footman spoke, but the thought of Scudamore's presence did not seem to displease her. A certain consideration and capability about him, in the terrible hour of the discovery of Geoffrey's death, had created in her a reliance on him which the two following days had only served to strengthen. There was a distinct eagerness in her eyes as she opened the drawing-room door.

Scudamore's face was still very subdued. His voice was subdued, too, as he met Valentine with a clumsy but genuinely anxious enquiry as to her health. He did not touch her. Perhaps one source of her growing confidence in him lay in the fact that his sympathy had taken no lover-like form. She answered him gently enough, and coming up to the fireplace let herself sink into a chair. Scudamore followed her, and stood before the fire, looking down at her slight figure with something that was almost wistfulness on his coarse face.

"Dorrisant has told you of the verdict?" he said somewhat abruptly.

Valentine's eyes were fixed on the fire as she answered, and they glittered in strange contrast to her weary face.

"Yes! 'Poison, by whom administered there is no evidence to show!'"

Her voice was curious; there was in it a suppressed ring of almost bitter excitement.

"And—the rider?" The words came from Scudamore hesitatingly.

Valentine lifted her face to him, and answered vehemently.

"Yes; the rider!" she said. "Mr. Scudamore, there is no one else I can speak to. My stepfather—how can I talk to him about what is breaking his heart? And a woman can do so little in these things! I must make some man understand how necessary, how absolutely necessary it is that the man who has done this horrible thing should be found. Mr. Gaunt will be arrested, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Scudamore.

He spoke with great gentleness, and his eyes were fixed upon her with that incongruous wistfulness deepened in them.

"Yes," said Valentine, clasping her hands fiercely as though to retain her self command. "He will be arrested, and he will be questioned and insulted, and then he will be released, as he was before; released with everything made worse for him by the mere suspicion, though there is not a shadow of evidence against him! Oh, it is too horrible that an innocent man should suffer all his life for a villain!"

She stopped, trembling from head to foot. The strain of the past two days was taking its revenge. Her self-control was slipping from her, and she hardly knew that it had gone.

"Dorrisant believes—" began Scudamore. His voice was low and dogged.

"I know," cried Valentine, rising impetuously from her seat and facing him. "I know; that is why I cannot talk to him. Everybody at Templecombe almost believes the same thing—that it was he who shot Geoff. Oh, don't you see, that is why the man who has done it now must be found? In justice to an innocent man he must! Nobody who knows the circumstances can imagine for one moment that Mr. Gaunt is the man who has poisoned him. Who it can possibly be I cannot think—I cannot guess. I have thought and thought over every word Geoff ever said to me, and I cannot find the faintest clue. There must be some one of whom we know nothing—some enemy of his father's, perhaps! But when the man who poisoned him is found, the man who shot him will be found too! Oh, I know it—I know it! Everything must be done, no stone must be left unturned, to find him. You will see to it—oh, you will see to it, won't you? Money will do a great deal. Spend what you

like of mine, only find the man! It is our duty, don't you see? All the injustice comes from us. Justice must come from us, too!"

There is a supreme moment of ecstatic self-abandonment, when self-consciousness is not, and self-deception touches its apotheosis. And this moment had come to Valentine. As she stood there, with her head thrown back, she was beautiful as she had never been in all her life before; and as he looked at her, a dull red flush crept over the forehead of the man who watched her, the wistfulness died out of his eyes, and his mouth set itself into dogged lines of determination.

As if the words were drawn from him against his will, he said sullenly:

"I'll do my best, of course."

Even as he spoke Valentine shivered, trembled helplessly for a moment, and burst into wild sobs and tears.

"Oh, Geoff!" she cried brokenly, "oh, my dear Geoff—my poor Geoff!"

And before Scudamore, in his amazement, could speak to her or touch her, she had hurried across the room and was gone.

#### CHAPTER XIX. "IT MEANS NOTHING."

ON the following day Geoffrey Cary was buried, and the inevitable sensationalism attendant on a sudden and mysterious tragedy sank into abeyance before the more solemn feelings which rose and laid their touch upon the lightest of those even remotely concerned.

Valentine was seen very little during that day; and such talk as passed between her, her stepfather, and Scudamore was subdued into harmony with the atmosphere about them. Not once did any of the three touch on the terrible spectre of dread and uncertainty that threw a ghastly shadow on the solemnity of the day.

One day followed another, and the household fell once more into its ordinary routine, with that terrible closing up round the gap which is so inevitable, and still that spectre darkened all the house. The murderer of Geoffrey Cary, if murdered he had been, was still far to seek. Kenneth Gaunt was arrested, examined, and released, there being no possible ground for his detention. And the police, this clue having broken in their hands, were, and practically owned themselves to be, completely at a loss. Day after day Valentine would come to Scudamore with the same question: "Have they found out anything?" To



receive always the same answer, given with the same sullenness: "Not yet." Valentine looked very thin and white in her black dresses, but her face was always quiet and composed. To Dorrisant, as he went about wrapped in a gloom that nothing seemed to lighten, she was tenderness itself. To Scudamore she was always gentle and kind, though she was never quite at ease with him after one evening when he took her suddenly into his arms and kissed her passionately. He released her almost instantly, apologising gruffly and awkwardly, and she neither resisted nor remonstrated, only she turned very cold and white.

Her time, as the days drifted on, was mainly occupied with Mrs. Carryl. The agitation of the inquest, coming on the horror of the preceding days, seemed to have shattered the little woman completely. For the first two days the doctor talked about brain fever. Mrs. Carryl appeared to grow no worse, however. She would lie silent for an hour at a time; then, if addressed, she would burst into hysterical sobs and tears, and cry herself into absolute exhaustion. But by degrees her fits of crying grew less violent. She was allowed to get up, and then Valentine was absolutely startled at the change which little more than a week had made in her. Always fragile, there seemed to be now literally nothing of her; and her eyes had a frightened, horrified look in them pitiful to see. It was to her jarred and quivering nerves that Valentine attributed the absolute dread of meeting Dorrisant which she tried feebly to conceal. To face grief, however quiet, is an ordeal even to a brave nature.

The passage of the days which spares no grief brought in due course the twelfth of February; the day which should have brought Geoffrey's majority. Neither Valentine nor her stepfather alluded to the date, but after lunch was over Valentine went up to her stepfather as he stood before the fire, looking absently down into it, and slipped her arm through his.

"What are you going to do this afternoon, dear?" she said softly.

He started, and looked at her with a little smile before he answered.

"I shall go for a walk, Queen Val. A good long walk."

Valentine pressed her cheek against his shoulder for a moment in mute sympathy. Then she turned and went gently out of the room.

She went upstairs, her face very tender

and pathetic, thinking evidently of the dead boy. But before she reached her own room the softness had died out of her face, merged in an almost fierce determination.

"Why don't they find him?" she said, speaking just below her breath, as though the intensity of her feeling was not to be denied expression. "Why don't they find him? They must and shall."

She stood for an instant, her hands pressed together, her face set in a passion of longing, which seemed almost a demand. Then she moved; her features settled into their usual expression, and she went down to Mrs. Carryl.

Valentine's representation that no one need see her there unless she wished it, had brought Mrs. Carryl into the morning-room. She had been lying back in a large arm-chair there all the morning, a little, weak figure. She started violently as Valentine opened the door, and the frightened eyes she turned towards it, and the trembling, parted lips, were pitiful to see. Valentine smiled at her, and coming across the room with a gentle, reassuring word, stood looking down with eyes of affectionate concern into the weak face upturned to her.

"Don't you feel any better this afternoon, Marion?" she said gently. She touched the little woman's forehead with a caressing gesture, and tried not to acknowledge to herself that Mrs. Carryl looked rather worse than better. "I wish I could do you good," she said.

Mrs. Carryl moved restlessly, and taking a fold of Valentine's dress into her hand, began to fold it nervously. Her lips quivered ominously. Valentine knelt suddenly down by the chair and took the two fluttering hands into her own strong ones.

"Marion," she said gently, "don't think me hard and unsympathetic, dear; but don't you think the time has come when you should try to get better? I know, of course," she went on very quickly and sweetly, "I know quite well how ill you feel; but if you tried to control your thoughts and your feelings a little, you would get stronger so much sooner, I am sure. You understand, don't you, dear?"

Mrs. Carryl bowed her head; she was clinging tightly to Valentine's hands; her lips were twitching helplessly, and there was a look in her eyes as of a terrified little animal that longs to speak and cannot.

"There is my stepfather," Valentine went on, with a little break in her voice.

"If you could see how—oh, Marion, Marion, don't!"

Mrs. Carryl had broken suddenly into such sobs as had not shaken her for two or three days now; she was clinging convulsively to Valentine, and her hands were cold and shaking.

"Oh, Valentine," she cried, "oh, Valentine, don't be angry with me! It isn't that I'm ill. I'm so miserable, I'm so miserable. I don't know what to do. I can't understand, and I can't think, and it keeps coming back to me. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

There was a ring in her voice of genuine, unendurable misery, which was very different from the self-created distress of morbid imagination, and a cold shock of vague dread passed through Valentine—why, she could not have told.

"Hush, Marion, hush!" she repeated instinctively. "Tell me what you mean!"

"I can't!" cried Mrs. Carryl wildly. "It's so dreadful of me to know it! You would hate me so if I said it. I know he must have some good reason, of course, and he never thought any one else knew. Oh, why did I come downstairs? Why can't I forget all about it? Of course, if it was of any consequence he would have said, only—only I can't get it out of my head. I feel as if I were doing something wicked."

"What do you mean, Marion? Of whom are you talking?"

Valentine's face had grown white to the very lips, with hope which in its intensity was almost fear. Her eyes were glittering, as though they saw, with an overwhelming sense of its nearness, the clue towards which she was straining. She was clutching Mrs. Carryl now almost fiercely, and her voice was low and peremptory.

"I was so startled," broke out Mrs. Carryl, wringing her hands feebly, "so dreadfully startled and confused. It came so suddenly. It was a dreadful thing to tell a lie, I know, but what could I do? I couldn't say he hadn't told quite the truth. He is so good and kind, and he must have had such a good reason! What could I do? Oh, what could I do?"

"Tell me what you mean, Marion!"

The words came from Valentine a low, hoarse command. With the intense expectancy of her face there was mingled now a shadowy, undefined dread.

"It was about half an hour after we went to bed," said Mrs. Carryl, burying her face in her hands, and giving up all reserve at

once in a flood of tears. "I—I wasn't very sleepy, and I did so want to finish that third volume; it—it was so lovely, you know. I had left it in the drawing-room, and I knew just where it was, and I thought I would run down and fetch it. I didn't take a light, there was the gas on the landing, you know, and I knew I could find the book in the dark. And just as I was coming out of the room with it, I heard a latchkey in the front door, and I waited, because I thought Mr. Dorrisant or Mr. Cary might see me. I had my dressing-gown on. I was only just inside the door, and I heard them both come in. Mr. Dorrisant must have noticed your fan—you left it downstairs, you know—for he said in a rather low voice, 'The party must have been dull, Geoff! They have come in, you see!' Mr. Cary laughed, and said, 'How sleepy of Val to go off to bed!' And then they both went to the smoking-room. I heard them."

"You heard——" Valentine was kneeling back on the floor now, her hands clenched together in her lap, her brows contracted. "But when was all this, Marion?" she said abruptly.

"On the night of the first of February. The night before—the night before Mr. Cary died," sobbed Mrs. Carryl.

A long, sighing breath, in which there was a sound of disappointment, parted Valentine's lips, and then she leant forward and put her hand on Mrs. Carryl's arm.

"Marion," she said, speaking very slowly, "you have fretted and worried yourself until you are imagining things. You must have dreamed what you say—since. Don't you see that it isn't possible that it really happened? Mr. Dorrisant did not come home with Mr. Cary that night. He went to the club. You heard him say so."

"I know," was the tearful, muffled answer. "That is what startled me so. Because I saw him, Valentine. I saw him. I couldn't believe my ears when he said that at the inquest. Everything went round and round. Oh, I wish I hadn't seen him! It seems so horrid and spying! But I did."

There was a silence. Mrs. Carryl's hysterics seemed to have passed away in the relief afforded her by speech, and she was crying quietly. Valentine sat on the floor, apparently too absolutely unconscious of her surroundings to think of moving, now and then lifting her hand to her head

as though she were in pain or dazed. A knock came at the door, and she rose to her feet, staggering a little as she did so, and saying mechanically: "It isn't possible, Marion," as though she was unaware that time had passed since she spoke last—time in which Mrs. Carryl, quite worn out, had absolutely cried herself to sleep.

The footman had come to tell her that Scudamore was in the drawing-room, and with a strange, stunned look on her face, she went downstairs.

"I came——" began Scudamore as she came up to him, and then he stopped short, staring at her. "Is there anything the matter?" he said clumsily. "I am afraid you're ill."

Valentine shook her head almost vacantly.

"I am quite well, thank you," she said in a dull, toneless voice. There's nothing——" She stopped abruptly, and then she moved on, mechanically apparently, to the window, Scudamore following her with an alarmed wonder in his face. "I think I will tell you," she said after a moment. "It isn't possible—it can't be possible, of course. You are his friend, and you will help me say so." She paused a moment, and then said in the same almost stupid tone: "Mrs. Carryl declares that my stepfather came home with Geoffrey that night. She says that she came down to the drawing-room for a book, and heard them come in—heard my stepfather speak and Geoffrey answer him."

She was looking straight out of the window, and she did not see the face of the man behind her. Over Robert Scudamore's features there flashed a sudden expression of horror-struck realisation—of ghastly suspicion suddenly become still more ghastly conviction. He tried to speak, but no words came from his lips, which had grown hot and dry. With a sudden, impulsive movement Valentine turned and faced him.

"Why don't you speak?" she demanded fiercely. "She dreamed it, of course, or if she did not dream it, it means nothing! Why don't you say so?"

But before he could say so—before he could bring his white lips to the utterance of a single word, she had fallen like a stone at his feet.

#### CHAPTER XX. FACE TO FACE.

THE room was very still. There was no sound or movement in it of any kind, except the slow crackling of the fire, and

the quick, heavy breathing of one of the two men who faced each other on either side of the table.

It was about eleven o'clock at night two days later, and Scudamore and Dorrisant were alone together in the smoking-room at Braton Street.

Dorrisant it was, certainly. The outline of his handsome features was unchanged; but except by that outline no one—not any member of the household—not Valentine herself, could have recognised him, he had in the past hour so utterly and completely changed. It was as if a finely-moulded mask had been taken from his face; a mask that had contained all the admirable traits of the face that every one had found admirable, and had left only the bare foundation on which that mask had rested.

In the foundation thus left there was the unmistakeable stamp of genuineness. The bitter sneer on his mouth was genuine; the hate that gleamed in his eyes was genuine; and the unscrupulously calculating expression of the whole face—all were genuine. It was true, beyond the possibility of doubt, that here and now was presented the real man—the true Mark Dorrisant, and none other.

The two pairs of fierce eyes held each other in the stillness as though it were a supreme moment of defiance. At last one of the two men moved. It was Dorrisant; and he carried the cigarette he held mechanically to his lips. It had gone out; and he flung it savagely into the grate, leaned back in his chair, and crossed his arms in an attitude of intense thought. His movement broke up the strain of the previous position, and Scudamore, almost as if released, moved also. Under his clenched hand as it lay on the table was a very small bottle, half empty; he took it up, instinctively, it seemed, and put it in his breast-pocket. Drops of perspiration were standing on his forehead; he was looking indefinitely coarser and rougher than usual, as though with him also, the lowest elements of his personality were exposed to view by the intensity of the moment.

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead; and as he did it, it was the common action of a common man.

"I never was your equal, Dorrisant," he said in a difficult, husky voice. "Not in brains, nor manners, nor nothing! Hang me if I'm your equal in blackguardism either!"

"Ah!" responded Mark Dorrisant curtly.

"These are your facts, then," he went on in a hard, metallic voice, not even looking at the other man, and evidently recapitulating and demanding confirmation as an assistance to his own mental processes. "My ward having died by poison, your thoughts go back to the past, and you find yourself vaguely uneasy and suspicious. You are told that I was seen to enter the house, when I have stated that I did not enter it, and your suspicions increasing, you cast about for a motive. Your mind takes a financial turn, and finding that I inherit young Cary's property under his father's will, it occurs to you as possible that I wanted that property. Pondering upon my financial position before Cary's death, you begin to question the truth of some statements I made to you two months ago as to the source of my income. You telegraph to Australia, ascertain that those statements were false, and thereupon arrive at the conclusion that I have no private income; and having thus established in your own mind the motive you sought, you take the liberty of searching my room and find in a private drawer, of which you are, perhaps, the only living man besides myself who knows the secret, the remains of a bottle of the poison of which young Cary died. That's all!"

"It's enough!" answered Scudamore gruffly. "What's the use of talking about 'establishing in my own mind,' and my 'arriving at conclusions'? I've spoken the truth, and you know it. Mrs. Carryl's statement and this bottle"—he touched his breast-pocket as he spoke—"would do your business safe enough even if you could show your accounts for the last three years. And you can't."

"No," assented Dorrisant, with a low, sardonic laugh, "I can't!"

There was another pause. Scudamore, his eyes fixed on Dorrisant with a kind of fascination in them, wiped his forehead again. Dorrisant sat perfectly motionless. At last he moved, folded his arms on the table, and looked across at the other. His face was hard and businesslike.

"Well," he said callously, "we may as well come to terms, I suppose. That little fool"—he spoke Mrs. Carryl's name with an oath—"can be managed. If I can't persuade her she has dreamt the whole thing, I've wasted nine months' work on her! And I can settle the girl too. It lies between you and me."

"Yes!" was the sullen answer. "It lies between you and me."

"When we met two months ago," went on Dorrisant, with the same hard deliberation, "the stakes were not even. Our cards were level enough. You held that Bettlesville business against my knowledge of you as Bob Hamilton, forger and card-sharper. But I had a position to lose"—the thin lips curled into the slightest suggestion of an evil smile—"a recital of that Bettlesville business would have destroyed my very valuable character, whereas you had nothing absolutely to lose. Consequently, we made our little bargain."

A curse came from Scudamore, and he moved uneasily on his chair. With his eyes fixed on the other's face, Dorrisant went on:

"Now, this business of mine is a big thing. I saw there was money in it when Cary began to talk of my seeing after the boy. He was a gentleman, and he was also a fool, for I hadn't been in the camp a month, and his will provided that in case of the boy's death before his majority I should step into the property. Of course, I didn't foresee then all the developements, but I foresaw plenty of money until the boy would come of age."

Dorrisant's manner had altered very subtly as he talked. Confidential would be far too strong a word for it, but it was indefinably suggestive of past partnership in dishonourable transactions between him and the man to whom he spoke. As if the suggestion influenced him in spite of himself Scudamore asked sullenly:

"How did you get him to make such a will?"

Dorrisant laughed.

"Get him, my good fellow!" he said. "It wasn't necessary to get him. He was more than willing. I don't think I saw the whole thing until the boy had a narrow squeak in a railway accident!"

"That was just before you left New York last winter?"

Dorrisant nodded.

"And then, I suppose," Scudamore went on, "it occurred to you as an alternative to look up—Templecombe." He made a pause before the last word, as if he had intended to pronounce Valentine's name, and found it impossible.

"Exactly!" was the reply. "I knew the girl could help me to a good position, at any rate. And there might have been a chance of handling her coin too. But she turned out such an independent spitfire, you see!"

"And so," said Scudamore fiercely, "find-



ing you couldn't deal with—her as you dealt with that poor quaking fool of a wife of yours, her mother, you fell back on the other game? I take it that was the meaning of that affair at Templecombe?"

Again Dorrisant nodded, and then with a movement of his hand as though to dispose of that branch of the subject, he said, resuming his businesslike tone:

"We're wandering from the point. What I began to say was this. Although this is a big thing for me—a big thing, I'm willing to admit, in more ways than one," he added significantly—"that other little bargain of ours has equalised the stakes, to a certain extent at least. You've got something to lose too, consequently you needn't open your mouth too wide. What do you want?"

The question came sharp and peremptory, and as he heard it a dark flush mounted to Scudamore's forehead. He leant back in his chair, sticking his legs out in front of him, and said doggedly:

"Suppose I don't want anything?"

Dorrisant looked at him for a moment with a quick flash of his eyes. Then he said very quietly:

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose I mean I've had a sickener?" said Scudamore without moving. "Suppose I mean I want to get straight and go straight; suppose I mean that I don't know what's come to me, but I feel myself the biggest brute and sharper going—except you—and I'm not going to blacken myself any further? Confound it all, that's what I do mean!"

He brought his fist down on the table with a crash as he spoke, leaning a little forward and glaring fiercely at Mark Dorrisant.

A curious kind of shade seemed to fall upon Mark Dorrisant's face; it seemed to grow almost grey with the intense consideration into which it was set. It was so concentrated that no surprise could express itself, but that very concentration implied the sudden appearance of a new factor in his calculations. His cool eyes never stirred from Scudamore's flushed face, as he said in a still, intent tone, with a suggestion of a sneer about it:

"This is a new line for you, Bob. You've taken a good deal of trouble to work this affair up if you don't stand to make anything by it!"

"I do stand to make something by it, then," retorted the other, his rough passion, the passion of desperate and unpalatable

resolution, contrasting strongly and most unfavourably with Dorrisant's self-restraint. "I'm going to show you up! By Heaven, I am!"

He started to his feet as he spoke, raising his hand and shaking it fiercely, as though in the coarse earnest of his determination he were calling on Heaven to hear him even against himself. A deeper shade darkened Mark Dorrisant's face, but he leant calmly back in his chair and crossed his legs.

"I think not," he said. "I think you mean to have my stepdaughter—and her money. And I don't think she would have Bob Hamilton!"

Scudamore turned upon him roughly.

"I know she wouldn't!" he cried. "I know what it means, through and through, I tell you, and I'm going to do it. I don't want her to have me! Lord knows how it's happened, but she's been getting at me ever since she said 'Yes' to me—trusting me and believing I was a decent sort of fellow—until I can't go near her, I can't be in the room with her, without feeling what a low scoundrel I am. Why, man, she couldn't live with me! A fellow can't help his nature, and when she came to know me I should be the death of her, just by being the kind of man I am—yes, if I kept as straight as straight, and she never heard anything about me—she being what she is." His voice shook a little, and he paused; to go on in an instant in thick, uncertain tones: "She doesn't care for me—how should she? And she does care for that fellow Gaunt—you know that, I suppose. When I found out that, I swore I'd keep her, and be hanged to it all! It makes it hard! By Heaven, it makes it hard! But now I know this about young Cary—now I see how black the whole thing is—there, I can't explain it, but I tell you I'm played out. I couldn't stand by and see her going on with you, knowing what I do of you. I've had enough of lies all round. I'm going to tell her!"

"That's very generous of you. I don't quite see why you feel bound to put her into Gaunt's arms, as you will certainly do; but it is very generous of you. You clear his character for him, and you give him your own promised wife. I assure you he will appreciate the gift, and it is certainly a gift worth having."

Dorrisant had spoken very quietly, so quietly that his tone, taken in conjunction with the whiteness of his lips, suggested that his calm was assumed to meet an even desperate crisis.

A fierce oath broke from Scudamore, and taking a blind, furious step forward, he stood glaring down at his adversary, his face inflamed and working, his hands convulsively clenched, his whole figure eloquent of the fierce struggle raging within between his desire and that strange impulse towards right which had come to him so late, and so unexpectedly, and which was drawing him whither he hardly knew. Dorrisant continued in the same still tone:

"When you saw her——"

He paused abruptly, and turned his head sharply towards the door. It opened as he did so, and into the room, in the sudden hush that had fallen, came Valentine. For the last two days she had hardly seen Dorrisant; she had complained of headache and had hardly left her room. Now she came straight across the room without a word, passing between the two men, and stood before her stepfather. She was wearing a soft trailing white gown, and her slender figure looked very graceful and womanly. Her face was pale and earnest, and the mouth was very sweet.

"I have come," she said in a low, clear voice, her frank eyes looking straight into Dorrisant's—"I have come to ask you to explain to me. I will not wrong you any longer by doubting your word without telling you that I must doubt it. I heard that you and Mr. Scudamore were here together, and I have thought and thought until I felt that I must come. Mr. Scudamore has told you what Mrs. Carryl has told me. Is it true? If it is true, what does it mean? I have trusted you. I trust you now."

She paused, and for a moment there was a dead silence. The low voice, the gentle truth and generosity of the words coming upon the hot passions of the two men created an indescribable effect of contrast, as the purity of her material presence contrasted with the figures of the two men, the one cold and still, only the grip of his fingers on his chair betraying him; the other heated, almost convulsed, with the sudden instinctive movement of outward self-control. At last Dorrisant said, slowly and deliberately:

"I am glad that you have come to me, Valentine. I can understand that your confidence must have been terribly shaken, and if I cannot help wishing that you had come to me at once, don't think I blame you. It is no wonder that you were confused and distressed beyond the possibility

of judgement. I, myself, at first was absolutely shocked and horror-struck."

With a swift impetuous movement Valentine fell on her knees beside her stepfather's chair and stretched out her hands to him.

"It isn't true!" she exclaimed, with a low cry of joy and relief. "It isn't true!"

"Poor Mrs. Carryl is a morbidly hysterical woman!" said Dorrisant very gravely. "I can bring you witnesses from the club—if you need them—to prove my presence there. No, it is not true!"

With another cry of joy she bent towards him, and he was just taking her into his arms when an inarticulate roar of fury broke from Scudamore, and he sprang forward and pulled her roughly back. The tumult which had been surging in him during the last few minutes had broken its bonds, and it was carrying him with irresistible impetus towards the right.

"No!" he cried hoarsely. "By Heaven, no! You shan't touch her! Miss Clinton, you want to find the man who killed young Geoffrey Cary! There he is!"

His touch had startled Valentine to her feet, and she stood, as he spoke, between the two men, shrinking a little from Scudamore, her bewildered, almost frightened eyes fixed on his face.

He lifted his passion-shaken hand as he finished and pointed to Dorrisant, and as he did so, with a low cry of repudiation and a shock of disbelief and indignation on her face, she turned instinctively towards her stepfather. She was too quick. She intercepted on Dorrisant's face—the face she had never before seen otherwise than kind and dignified—a look cast upon Scudamore of such deadly malignity, such desperate, infuriated threatening, that she seemed for the moment to be looking at a hideous travesty of the features she knew. Her expression changed pitifully; she staggered back a step and covered her face with her hands with a faint gasp.

Dorrisant had started to his feet, but before he could speak Scudamore went on, glaring past Valentine's white figure right into the deadly-looking face confronting his.

"I'm giving myself away in telling you!" he went on fiercely, and in spite of the rough phrase, in spite of the coarse passion of the man, there was a desperate earnest, a genuine self-abnegation about him which gave him a strange wild touch of dignity. "He'll tell you the truth about me when I've done, unless I tell you

myself. But I don't care. I've had enough of him for this time, and I won't stand by and see you trusting such a villain. I know him through and through, and you don't know one of his thoughts, though he is your stepfather. He's fooled you from first to last. He came to you posing as a rich man—a man who wanted nothing of any one. That was his game. He hadn't a penny in the world of his own; he was living on the boy's money. He'd have had your money if you'd been another sort; he came to see what could be done with you, and found his best game lay in the independent line. He had got the boy's father to make a will in his favour, failing the boy, and before he had been in your house two months he made his first shot at getting the poor chap out of the way."

A cry broke from Valentine. She lifted her face to Dorrisant for an instant, drawn with horror and passionate incredulity, and then dropped it on her hands again.

With a fierce imprecation, as though the sight of her agony inflamed his fury against Dorrisant, Scudamore strode to the latter as his grey lips moved as if to speak, and gripping him by the wrist said savagely:

"You shan't! She shall hear it out first, I swear."

Still with his large, powerful grip on Dorrisant he turned his face to Valentine and went on:

"He's not a man to be beaten, and he managed things cleverly next time, but he reckoned without his hosts—Mrs. Carryl and myself. Mrs. Carryl's right enough, of course. He did come in with the boy that night, and calculating that not a soul could know of it, he gave him his dose in his whisky, or what not. Then he cabbed it down to the club, and proves his alibi by swearing that he walked from Hyde Park Gardens! I know him of old, and when I heard from you what Mrs. Carryl said, I looked round in his room. He's got an old despatch-box that I know of old, too. There's a secret drawer in it, and in that secret drawer I found the bottle from which he settled the boy."

He stopped; but there was no movement of that slender girlish figure, standing now with its face crushed down upon its clenched hands. The breath was coming in long, laboured gasps, which seemed to shake her from head to foot.

Dorrisant's face seemed to have grown

sharp and thin; his lips were nothing but a straight grey line; his eyes were indescribably intent. A cruel gleam came into them now, and he moved as if to speak, glancing down as he did so at Scudamore's hand upon his wrist. But again Scudamore stopped him roughly. It was curious to see how the coarser, inferior nature—mentally speaking—had risen above itself in its fierce struggle towards all it could see of right, and Scudamore was master of the situation.

"No," he said, and the dignity about him struggled into still more definite expression, "I'll tell her myself." He turned to Valentine again, and his voice thickened a little. "I'm part of his lies," he said. "He and I have been in many a little game out West, though I draw the line at cold-blooded murder; and there was one little business I could have split upon that would have made things very awkward for him. He wasn't pleased to meet me when I turned up two months ago; but we squared things. I'd seen you in the Park, and I—well, I thought a lot of you. He told me there was money with you, and we arranged that I should hold my tongue about him, and he should help me to you. He introduced me as a rough sort of gentleman—a good sort. I'm a card-sharper and a gambler by profession, and there isn't a line in my record that would seem to you straight. I was cleaned out, and he lent me the money to cut a dash with—the boy's money, of course. I got on right enough until you said 'yes' to me, but since then—well, you've been too much for me."

His voice broke, and he dropped Dorrisant's wrist abruptly and turned away. There was a heavy, dead silence; then Valentine let her hands fall by her sides, and lifted her face. She turned her dark, horror-filled eyes on Dorrisant with a look in them as though she saw him across an immeasurable gulf; but still she did not speak. Dorrisant met her eyes with his own, hard and calculating, and then there stole over his face, brought there by who can tell what superhuman effort of his iron will, a ghastly shadow of his usual semi-paternal expression. He drew a step nearer to her.

"Is it true?"

The words came from her in a weak, trembling voice, but as she spoke them, Mark Dorrisant stopped short. There was a stern demand in every drawn line of her white face that made her look like

a terrible accusing angel, and meeting that demand the man before her saw that his chance was over. His face settled suddenly into a callous, reckless cynicism.

"Yes," he said brutally.

The white figure swayed for a moment, and Valentine stretched out her hand and caught at the back of a chair.

"My mother—my mother loved you!" she said. "Go!"

He bowed ironically; he was beaten; the game was hopelessly lost. It was a case for instant flight, and in his impotent, baffled rage his cruelty rose and cried savagely for revenge, however mean.

"This will be a pleasant business to explain to the ill-used Gaunt," he said. "It is a pity he does not return your passion." Then he turned savagely to Scudamore. "You may as well come, too, confound you," he said; "you're played out, too."

Scudamore glanced irresolutely at Valentine as she stood, still grasping the back of the chair, gazing straight before her. Her face had changed not at all at Dorrisant's last words; more ghastly it could not become. Then he turned and followed Dorrisant out of the room.

The door closed upon them, and still Valentine did not move. There was an interval of silence, and then the front door banged heavily. Valentine stretched out her hand as though groping her way, passed across the room, across the hall, up the stairs, still in the same stumbling, groping fashion, went into her own room, and shut the door.

#### CHAPTER XXI. A LIFELONG TRUCE.

THREE days had passed—three days during which a great deal of excitement and conjecture had been rife in Valentine's household; firstly as to the important business which, as had been announced, had summoned Mr. Dorrisant suddenly to America; and secondly, as to whether Miss Clinton was on the verge of a serious illness or was really fretting at the absence of Mr. Scudamore, also called to America.

Valentine was in the morning-room alone. The events of the last few days, and her share in bringing them about, had been instantly, though feebly, realized by Mrs. Carryl, on hearing accidentally of Dorrisant's departure, and her feeble strength had been completely taken away again by the realisation. She was ill again, and in a state verging so nearly on

brain fever that Valentine had got a nurse for her. Therefore Valentine was alone, and she was glad to be so. She had been in the morning-room for nearly an hour, and during that time she had never moved. She had been sitting with her hands clasped together in her lap, her whole figure tense and rigid, her eyes dark and fixed, as though she were bracing herself for an ordeal. The last three days had changed her as only terrible and relentless mental suffering can change a face. There were lines and shadows about her mouth which made it look ten years older; the eyes had a strained, agonised look, as though they were gazing always at something incomprehensible and infinitely terrible; the cheeks were hollow and perfectly colourless.

"A gentleman to see you, if you please, miss."

Her white lips set themselves into a line which made her face strangely heroic, like the face of a woman nerved to meet a supreme moment of pain, as she took the card the footman brought her and rose. She did not look at the card; apparently her visitor was expected, and his name known to her.

"You have shown the gentleman into the dining-room?" she said quietly.

"As you told me, miss."

She went downstairs with the same quiet resolution of movement, opened the dining-room door, and went in. Standing by the table, his face pale and almost defiant, was Kenneth Gaunt.

Valentine made no attempt to shake hands. With the same rigid self-control she bowed, and sitting down, made a movement that he should do the same. But Kenneth chose to disregard the tacit invitation, and remained standing stiffly.

"Your note was urgent, Miss Clinton," he began, arming himself, as it seemed, with a certain resentment of tone, "therefore I have come. You are very good to take an interest in me, but as I told you, nothing can be done, and interviews, I imagine, are painful to us both." He paused a moment, and glanced at her black frock and white face. "May I say—to you," he said hesitatingly, and flushing a little, "how shocked and sorry I am?"

Her hand clenched itself tightly as it lay in her lap, and ignoring the latter part of his speech, she said in a cold, measured voice:

"My note was urgent because I have something—urgent—to say to you. Will



you, please, sit down? I have a good deal to say, and I cannot say it with you standing. It is not—easy."

Her breath caught sharply, and she stopped. Kenneth looked at her quickly, and a curious change, a kind of shock, passed over his face. He sat down near her without a word.

And then she told him—told him coldly and deliberately, holding herself in a grip of steel, the intensity of which was the measure of what she controlled—how and by whose hand Geoffrey Cary had come to his death. She told him the whole story, simply and baldly, stating the bare facts, neither extenuating nor explaining, choosing her words and phrases with a certain precision, as though she had gone over the scene in her own thoughts many times.

"These are all the facts," she said finally. "It was my duty—it was just," her voice rang for the first time as she said the word—"that you should know them. I do not know, I have not wished to think, what you will think it right to do. You must be set right with the world, of course. I have waited three days before telling you, to give him time. Perhaps you will blame me for that. Perhaps it is a wrong to Geoffrey as well. I could not help it. My mother loved him, and I——"

Her voice died away, and she sat still, as though instinctively clinging to her self-control, her lips trembling a little.

Kenneth Gaunt moved abruptly and lifted his head. He had listened in perfect silence, his face screened by his hand, and he lifted it now, shocked and awe-stricken, but not surprised. He had apparently intended to speak, but the words seemed to fail him. He glanced at the mute anguish of her face, and there was a silence. At last he said in a low, shaken voice:

"I—I am very sorry."

The words sounded so helpless and so inadequate that he stopped again. Then he went on in a blundering, confused kind of way, gaining firmness and force as he spoke:

"As for doing anything, don't think for a moment that I would. It—it's a terrible business, but nothing will make it better. Nothing will undo what's done! I can do without setting myself right with the world. I've been a fool and taken things the wrong way, but—I shall begin again. The truth is known to you and to me, and to—to

two others. It need never be known to any one else."

The set lines of Valentine's face quivered and broke up. She turned it to him all stirred and glowing with emotion, and clasped her hands passionately together.

"Oh," she cried, "that can't be! I must not let you! Not even for my mother's sake."

Kenneth Gaunt rose suddenly and came and stood beside her. His face, too, was moved and working. The crust of proud reserve in which he had wrapped himself was broken through, and the very man, impulsive and passionate, had come to the surface.

"No, not for your mother's sake," he said rapidly, in a low, burning voice. "For yours! Let me do this for you, and I shall look the world in the face and laugh—yes, if it shouted 'murderer' after me half over England. I was a hot-headed, conceited ass. I never knew until it was too late how much I loved you. Oh, I don't mean that I could ever have had a chance with you! You were out of my reach always. I know that! It was because I loved you, though I didn't know it, that I quarrelled with you. It was because I was half mad with jealousy that I quarrelled with—with him! Oh, I know it now! It's all my fault. If I'd been a better sort of fellow—if I'd behaved decently to you when—they first came, you'd have had a friend by you to see to things for you. It's not much I can do—to hold my tongue. You'll let me do it?"

He had poured out his words vehemently, passionately, not as though his declaration could affect her in any way except in winning from her the boon for which he asked; and she had listened with her face upturned to his, her lips parted, her eyes dilated in a wonderful amaze. Her very breath seemed to be suspended. He stopped, and she did not speak or move.

"You'll let me do it?" he repeated urgently.

Still she did not speak, and suddenly he stepped back, his eyes on hers, his face quite colourless.

"It isn't possible!" he said, in an odd, breathless sort of way. "It isn't possible!"

The colour from his face seemed to sweep into hers in a soft crimson flood. It was her only answer, and with a choked, inarticulate cry, he took two steps to her side.

"Valentine," he cried, "Valentine, speak to me!"

She stretched out both her hands to him, and he fell on his knees by her side.

"I have tried to think it was justice," she whispered; "but I have known—in my heart I have known—that it was love!"

It was a lovely summer morning two years later. The windows of the library at Templecombe were wide open, and a soft, sweet-scented summer breeze straying into the room, touched and gently stirred the pretty hair of Valentine as she stood by her husband's side.

It was the room in which they had had so many business interviews; the room from which she had once ordered him with such passionate scorn; the room in which they had once parted, each with a breaking heart, each ignorant of the other's pain.

Kenneth was sitting at the writing-table, his face upturned to his wife as she stood with one hand resting on his shoulder and an open letter in the other. Her face was grave, and there was a certain horror in her eyes, but it was evidently a horror of the moment only, for the beauty that had grown upon her in the last two years was the beauty of happiness. Valentine had married Kenneth Gaunt six months after the day on which she sent for him to tell him that the truth was proved.

And Valentine's eighteen months of dual solitude had been eighteen months of the deepest happiness she had known in life.

The only cloud, indeed, that had touched her married life had been the shadow of the past; and time, with every day, rendered that shadow fainter. The stain that had rested on Kenneth's name had been obliterated from the remembrance of the people who had cast it, with one of those sudden reactions to which popular opinion is prone, on his return to Templecombe as master.

The tragic death of Geoffrey Cary, and the comparatively simultaneous disappearance of Mark Dorrisant, gave rise to endless conjecture and discussion, and the conclusion generally arrived at, and spoken of in horrified whispers, was not far from the truth. So Valentine came through

peace to content, through content to happiness. There were left on her scars from that bitter past that no time could take away, but the wounds that had made them hurt her no longer.

Mrs. Carryl, immediately after Valentine's marriage, had, to her own great amazement, married an old Indian Colonel who had met her at the house in Bruton Street. He was six feet high, he possessed a gruff voice, and his temper had perhaps been better in youth.

"He told me to, Valentine," was Mrs. Carryl's feeble answer when she was asked by Valentine why she had accepted him.

But the Colonel, though gruff, was very good at heart, and his weak little wife trembled very happily under his sway.

"Read it, dear," said Valentine in a low voice, and she put the letter she held into Kenneth's hand as she spoke.

Kenneth took it, and his face, too, grew grave and stern as he read. The letter was from Scudamore, and it told in a few brief sentences of Mark Dorrisant's death—a ghastly death in a gambling fray in San Francisco.

"I heard of it," wrote Scudamore, "I wasn't with him; but it was a bad affair, and it was all over the city. I thought it was he—I'd met him a day or two before—and I went to see. It was he, true enough. He must have got through all that poor boy's money, somehow, and he had come pretty low. I wasn't with him." The words were repeated with anxious insistence. "I've tried to keep straight, because of you. I thought I'd like you to know this."

Enclosed was a newspaper cutting containing an account of the affair.

Kenneth read the letter through, and then reread the last sentences more than once. When he gave it back to his wife his words did not refer to Dorrisant.

"Poor fellow!" he said gently.

Valentine had taken the scrap of newspaper from the table and had been reading it. She laid it down now, and her hand shook a little.

"Poor Geoffrey!" she said very softly. "Poor, poor Geoffrey!"

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